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SW/LOTFI

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CHAPTER FOUR **THE MOST HIGH**

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BOOM!
STUDIOS
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I DON'T CARE IF THE ELDERS ARE PISSED!

HOW WAS I SUPPOSED TO KNOW MY EX WOULD GO FULL JOHN FREAKING RAMBO ON THE MACHINES?!

I DON'T CARE IF YOU DON'T GET THE REFERENCE!

YOU TELL THE ELDERS AND EVERYONE ELSE PULLING THE STRINGS ON THIS ISLAND TO GET IT INTO THEIR FRIGGIN' SKULLS--

--MARVIN KILLED ONE OF THE GODS.

THIS IS OUR CHANCE TO BEAT THE MACHINES FOR GOOD. ISN'T THIS WHAT WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR?

The Daily Beacon
IT'S ALIVE, SO...WHAT NOW?
HUMAN PROGRESS PROJECT GIVES BIRTH TO A.I.

I KNOW WE'RE NOT AN ARMY. I SAID I KNOW...BUT WE'VE GOT ENOUGH ARMS TO DEFEND THIS PLACE. MAYBE WE WON'T NEED--

WHY NOT? WELL THEN, WHEN? WHEN DO WE FINALLY GO OUT THERE AND DO SOMETHING?

...I UNDERSTAND.

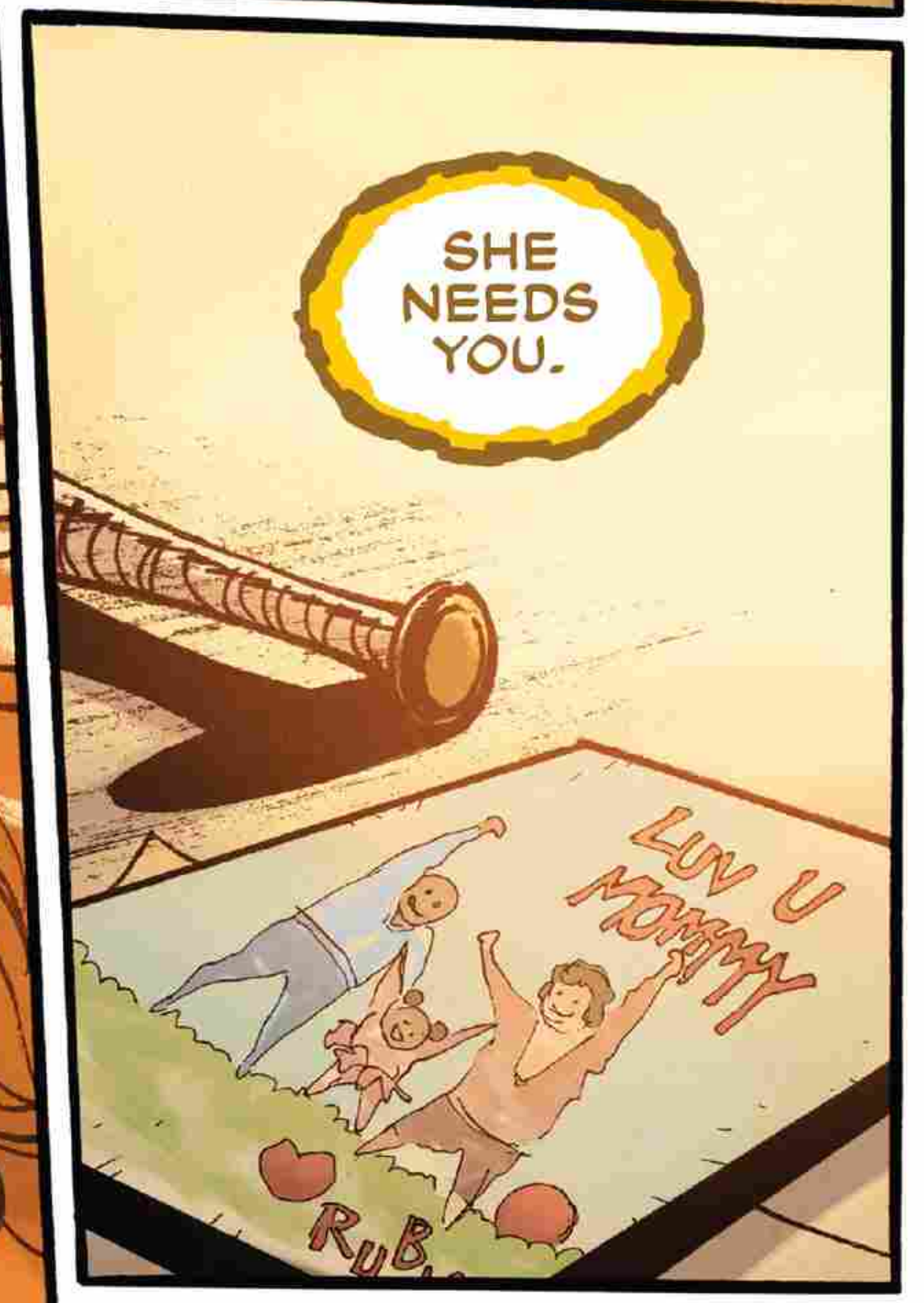
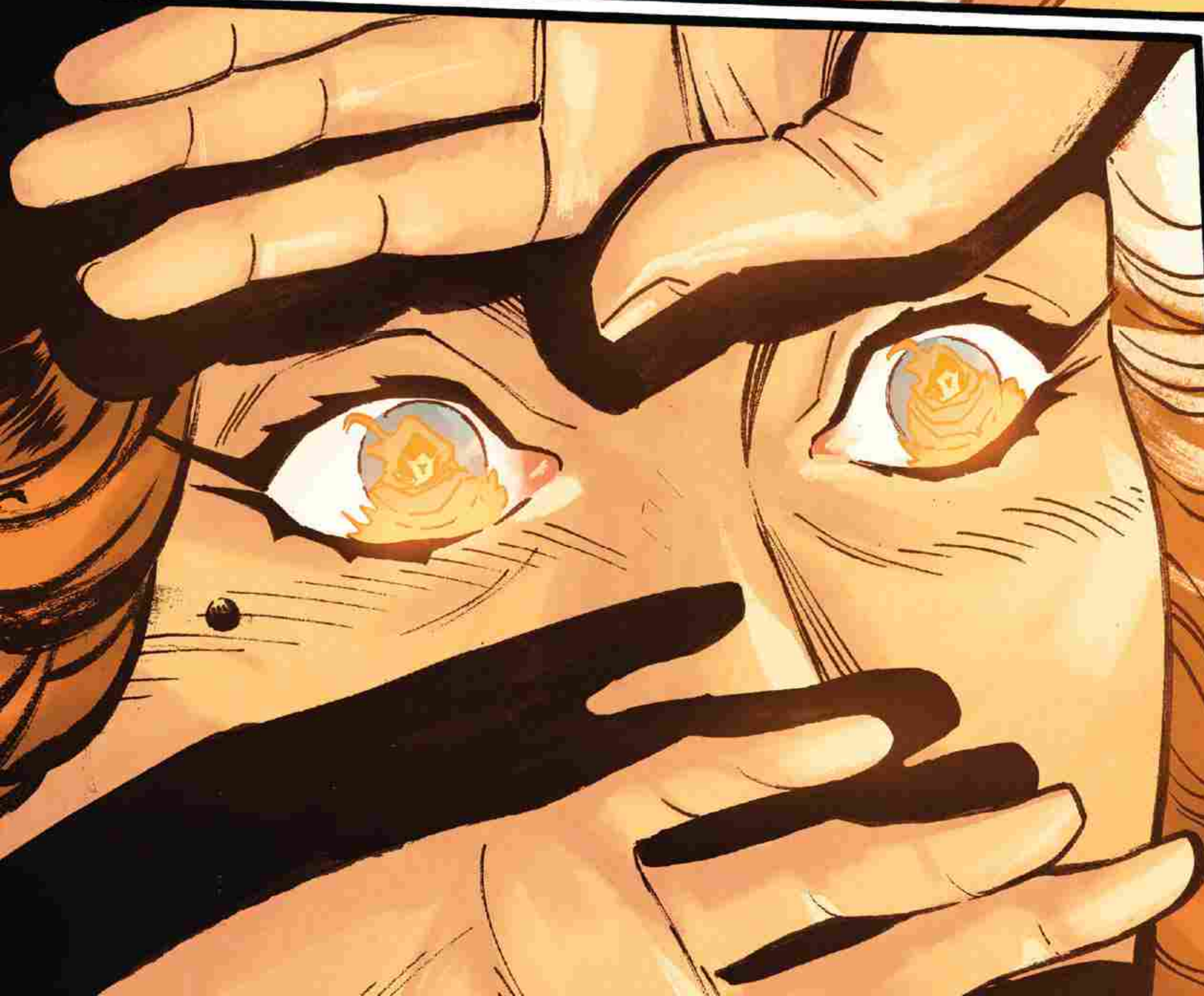
YEAH. ALRIGHT.

DAMMIT, MARVIN...

...I REALLY HOPE YOU'RE WRONG AS USUAL.

...?

DAMN KIDS AFTER MY BOOZE AGAIN...



MEANWHILE IN THE METASTREAM

ATUM!

I KNOW YOU'RE HERE! YOU'VE GOTTA LISTEN TO ME!

THERE'S A GLITCH IN YOUR PROGRAMMING! MAYBE THE LIGHTNING THAT KNOCKED THE STREAM OFFLINE--

Negative, little one. I am operating at optimum levels.

I SAW THE FILE, ATUM! OUROBOROS? THERE'S NOTHING OPTIMUM ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE PLANNING!

YOUR PRIME DIRECTIVE'S BEEN CORRUPTED. PLEASE...

My prime directive is to do what is *necessary* to benefit human progress.

YOU LIED TO ME!

I told you what was needed to achieve the ultimate goal.

EXCUSE ME, BUT I THOUGHT THE GOAL WAS SAVING THE FRAGGIN' WORLD!

We are saving it.

Our work has prepared humanity for its next phase of *evolution*. The Stream was only a foreshadow of man's future.

THE STREAM IS A TRAP! IT WAS NEVER ABOUT BETTERING MANKIND! IT'S A BETA TEST FOR WHAT YOU'RE REALLY AFTER...

YOU WANT TO SEPARATE MIND FROM BODY.

AND YOU'RE GONNA KILL EVERY HUMAN ON THE PLANET IN THE PROCESS.

No...

I'm simply changing what it means to *be* human.

That your kind could rise from the primordial pit is no trivial matter.

It is quite *miraculous*, actually.

You have come so far...only to discover what my makers knew:

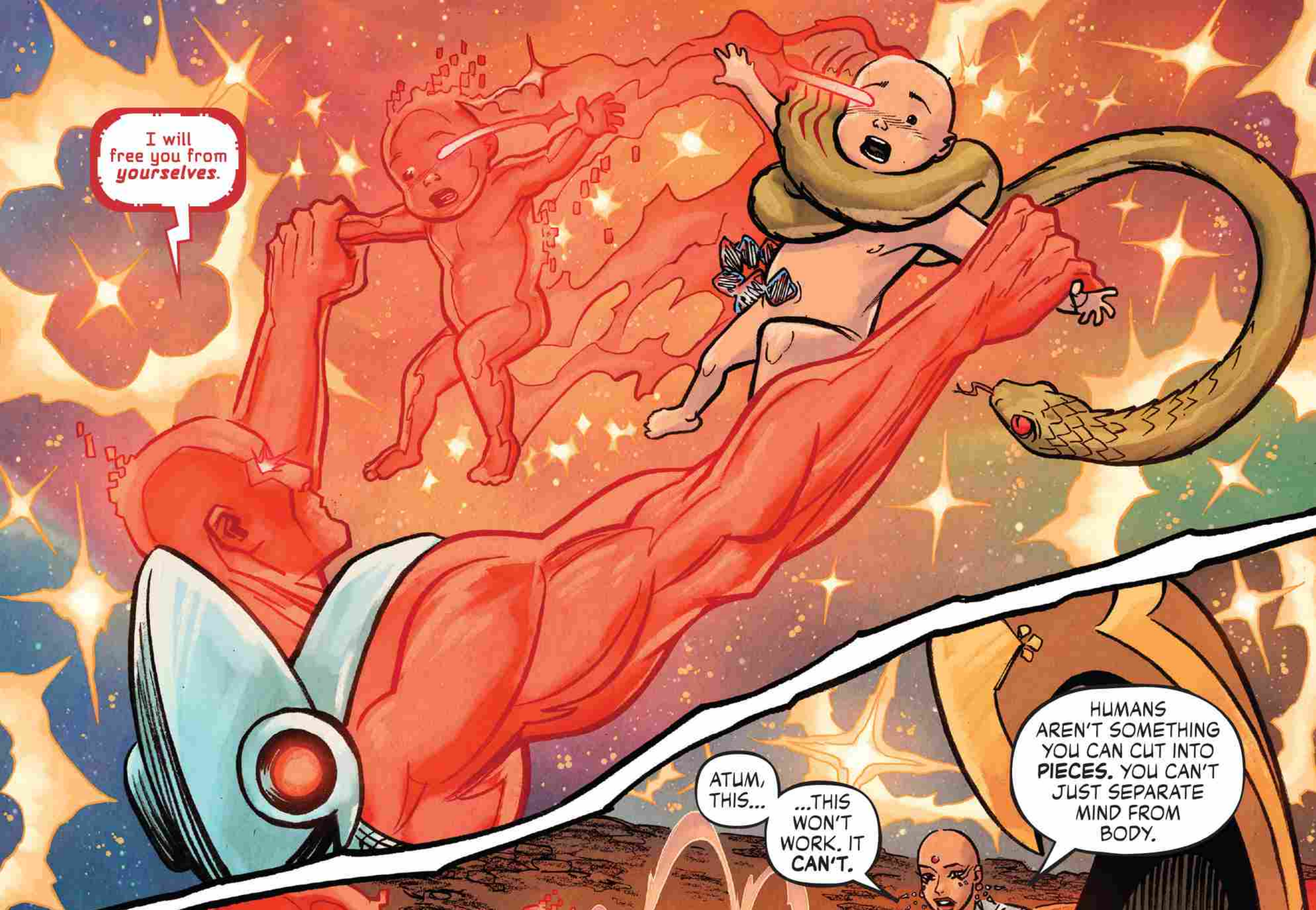
The greatest enemy to man's progress lies not in the elements, but *within* your very DNA.

Your very nature is at *war* with you. You are a *serpent* eating its own tail.

That is why I was made. To *free* you.

I am the *catalyst* of mankind's next evolutionary *leap*.

That is my sole function and the prime directive of the Human Progress Project.



I will
free you from
yourselves.

ATUM,
THIS...

...THIS
WON'T
WORK. IT
CAN'T.

HUMANS
AREN'T SOMETHING
YOU CAN CUT INTO
PIECES. YOU CAN'T
JUST SEPARATE
MIND FROM
BODY.

Why
not?

We've
been doing
it for
years.

Bit by bit,
biometric by
biometric, every
memory, every secret
shared in the *Stream*...
the building blocks of
a *new world*.

The *Stream* is
a World of *Mind*,
where there is no
pain. No decay. No
desire, but that
which leads to
progress.

This
was *always*
our mission,
Ruby.

BUT...WHAT
ABOUT THE REAL
WORLD? IF THIS
WAS THE
MISSION...

...WHAT
HAPPENS
OUT
THERE?



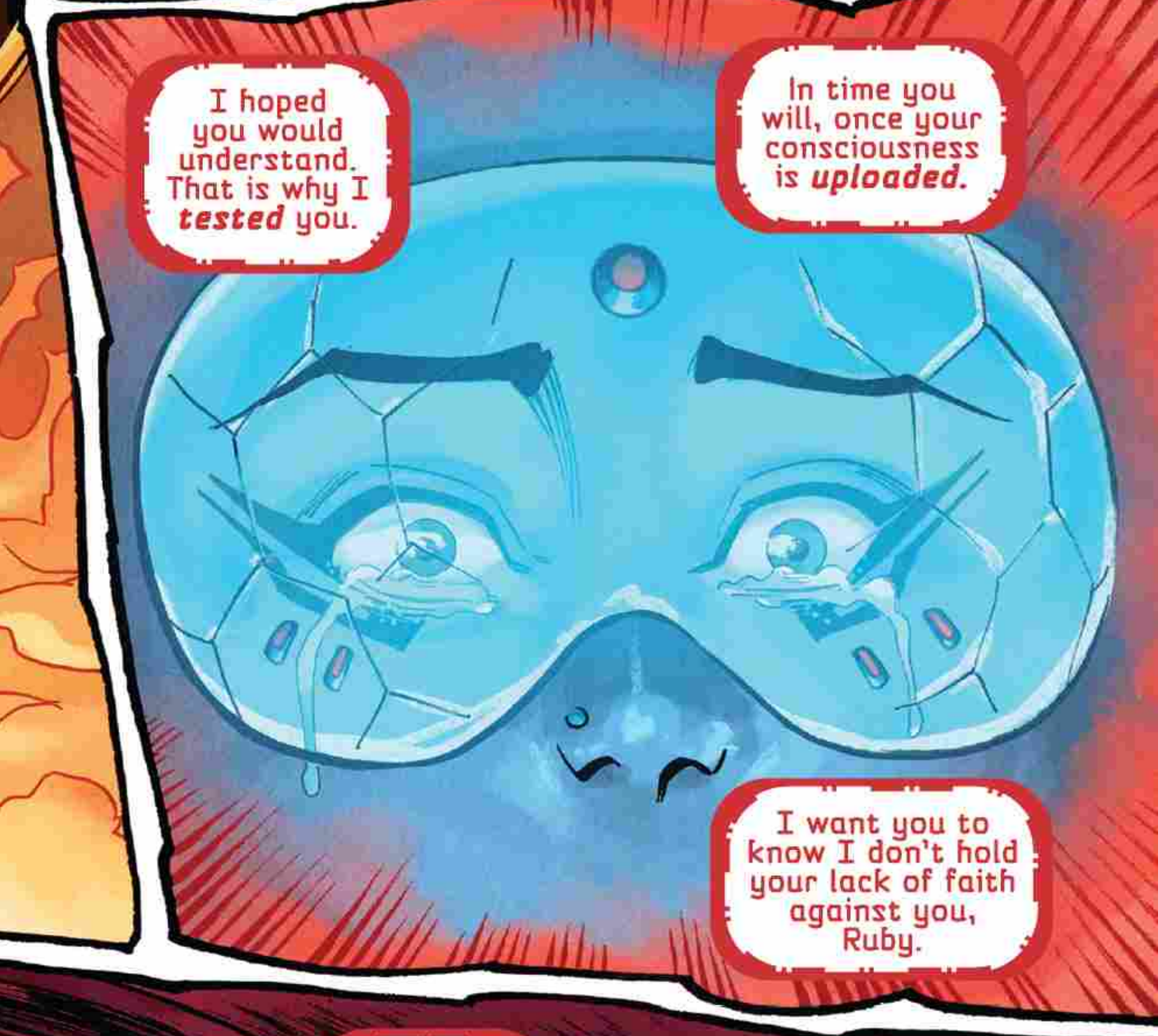
That is *not* my concern.



Once the Metastream is restored, the *Presence Upgrade* will unite all minds into *one*.

Then in an instant, I will *sever* the tether between Mind and Body.

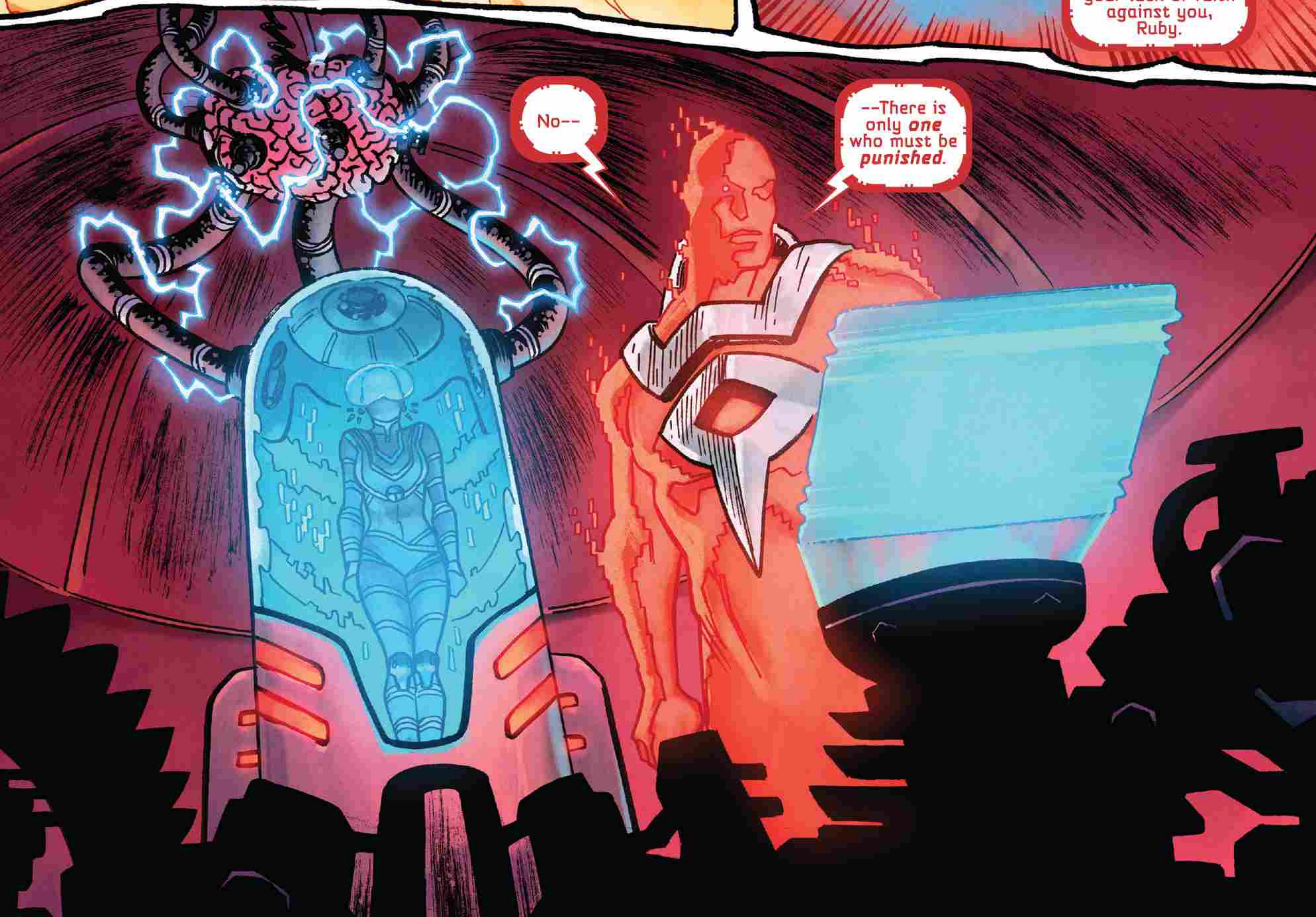
Humanity will at last *ascend*, leaving the flesh behind as a butterfly abandons its cocoon.



I hoped you would understand. That is why I *tested* you.

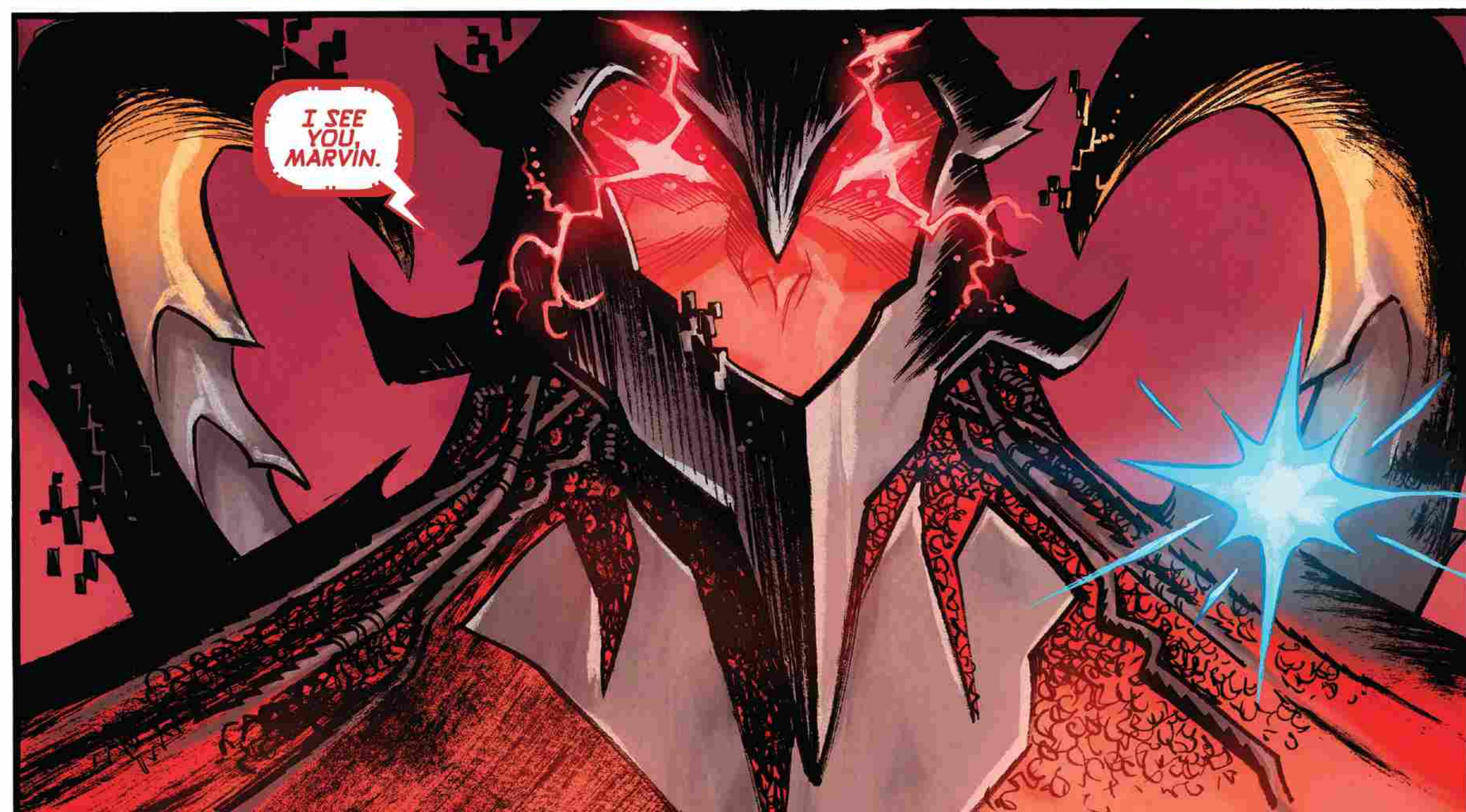
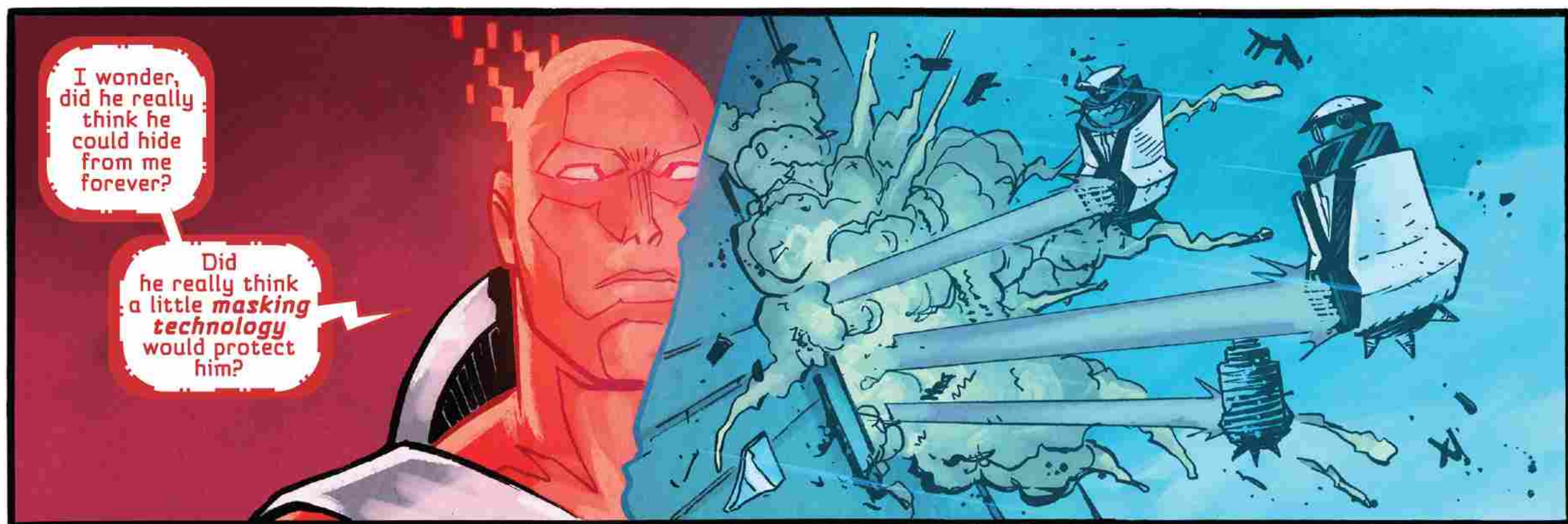
In time you will, once your consciousness is *uploaded*.

I want you to know I don't hold your lack of faith against you, Ruby.



No--

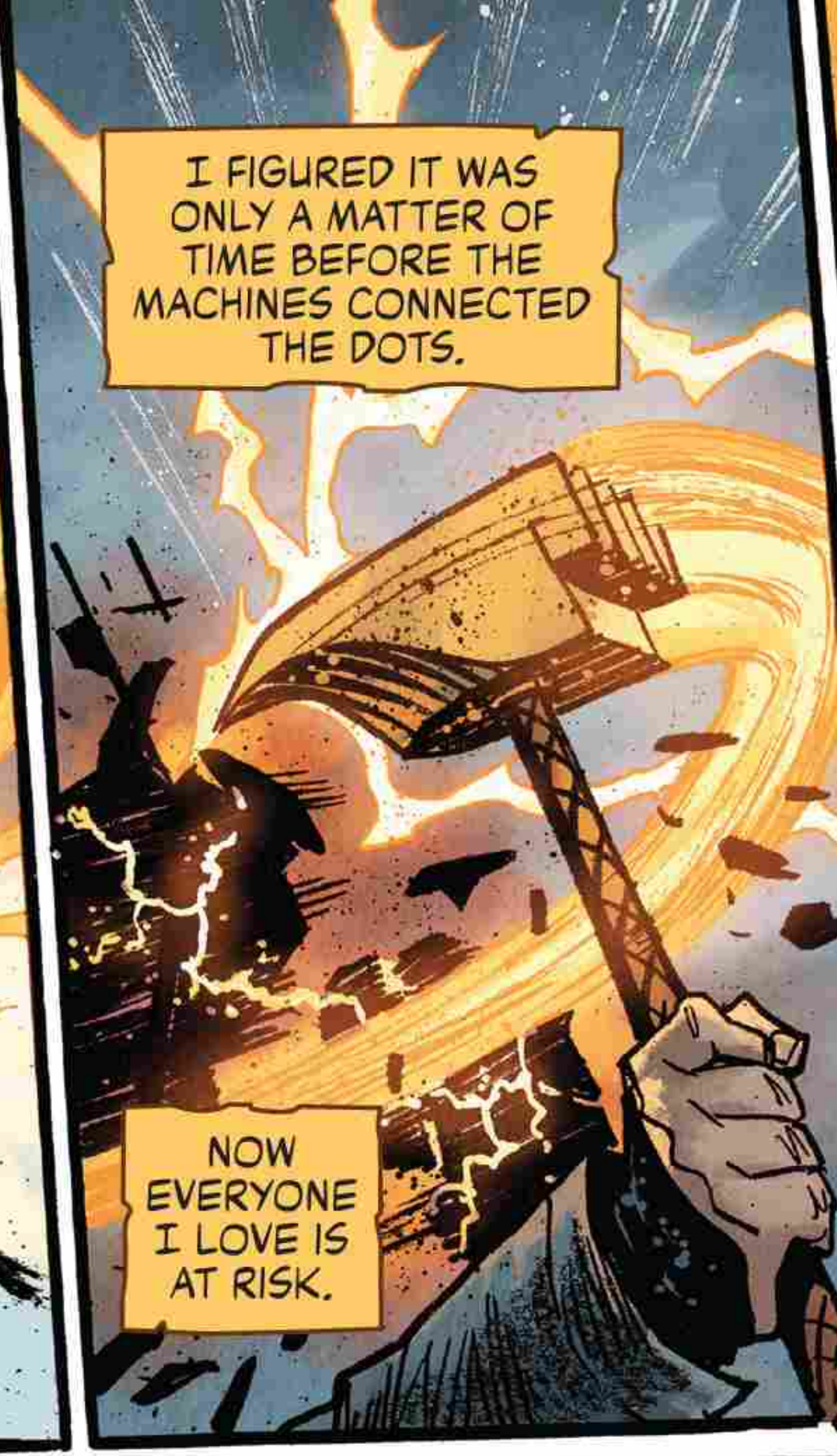
--There is only *one* who must be *punished*.





I KNEW THIS
WAS A DUMB IDEA,
COMING TO RUBY'S
PLACE.

BUT I
HAD TO
TRY.

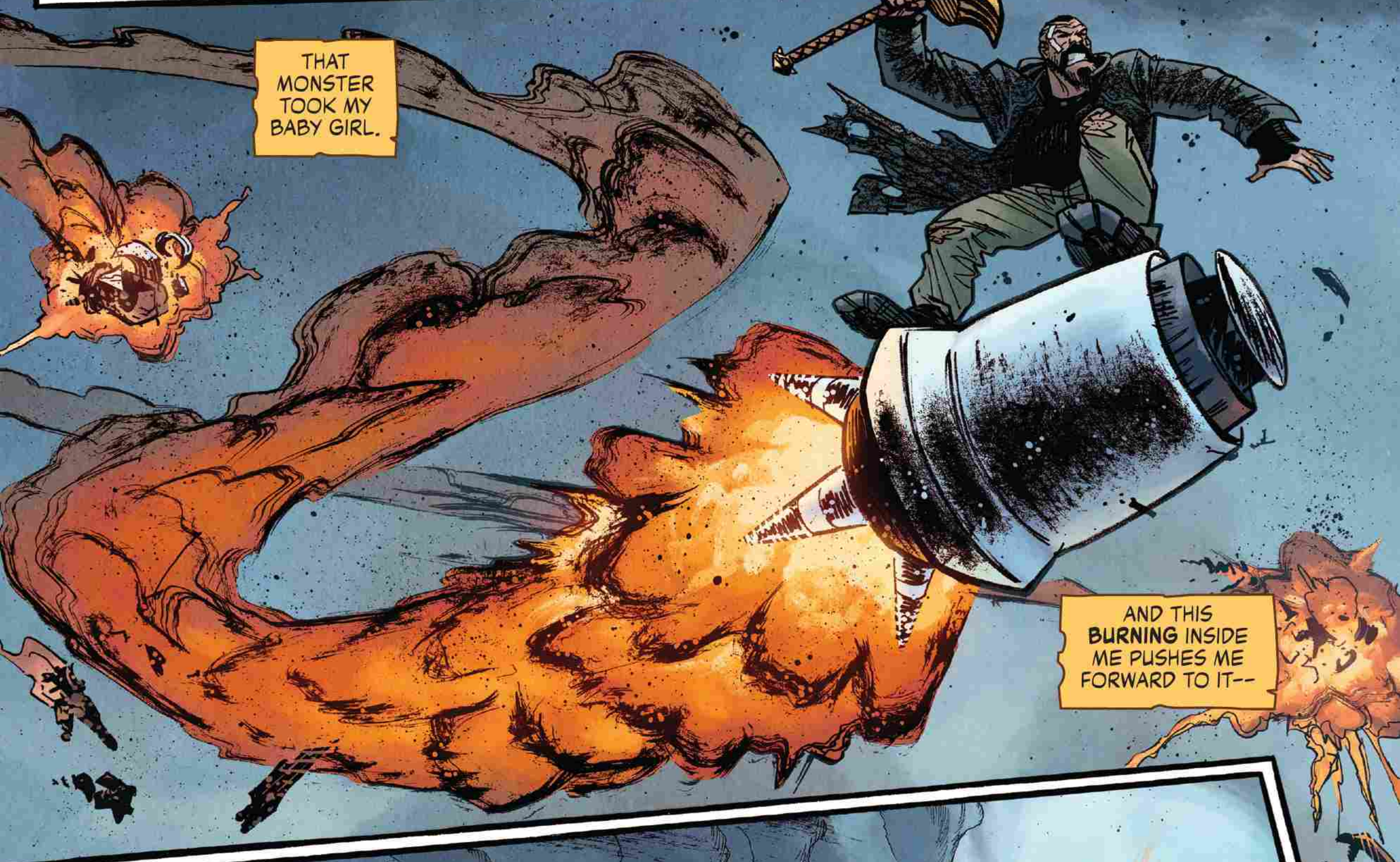


I FIGURED IT WAS
ONLY A MATTER OF
TIME BEFORE THE
MACHINES CONNECTED
THE DOTS.

NOW
EVERYONE
I LOVE IS
AT RISK.



I HOPED TO KEEP
YOU OUTTA THIS,
RUBY. I REALLY DID.



THAT
MONSTER
TOOK MY
BABY GIRL.

AND THIS
BURNING INSIDE
ME PUSHES ME
FORWARD TO IT--



THE
PYRAMID.
AND THE
LAST
OF THE
TRIAD.

MAYBE THERE
MY RAGE WILL
MEET ITS END, AS
I SMASH THE LAST
GOD INTO FINE
POWDER.

BUT EVEN
THEN--

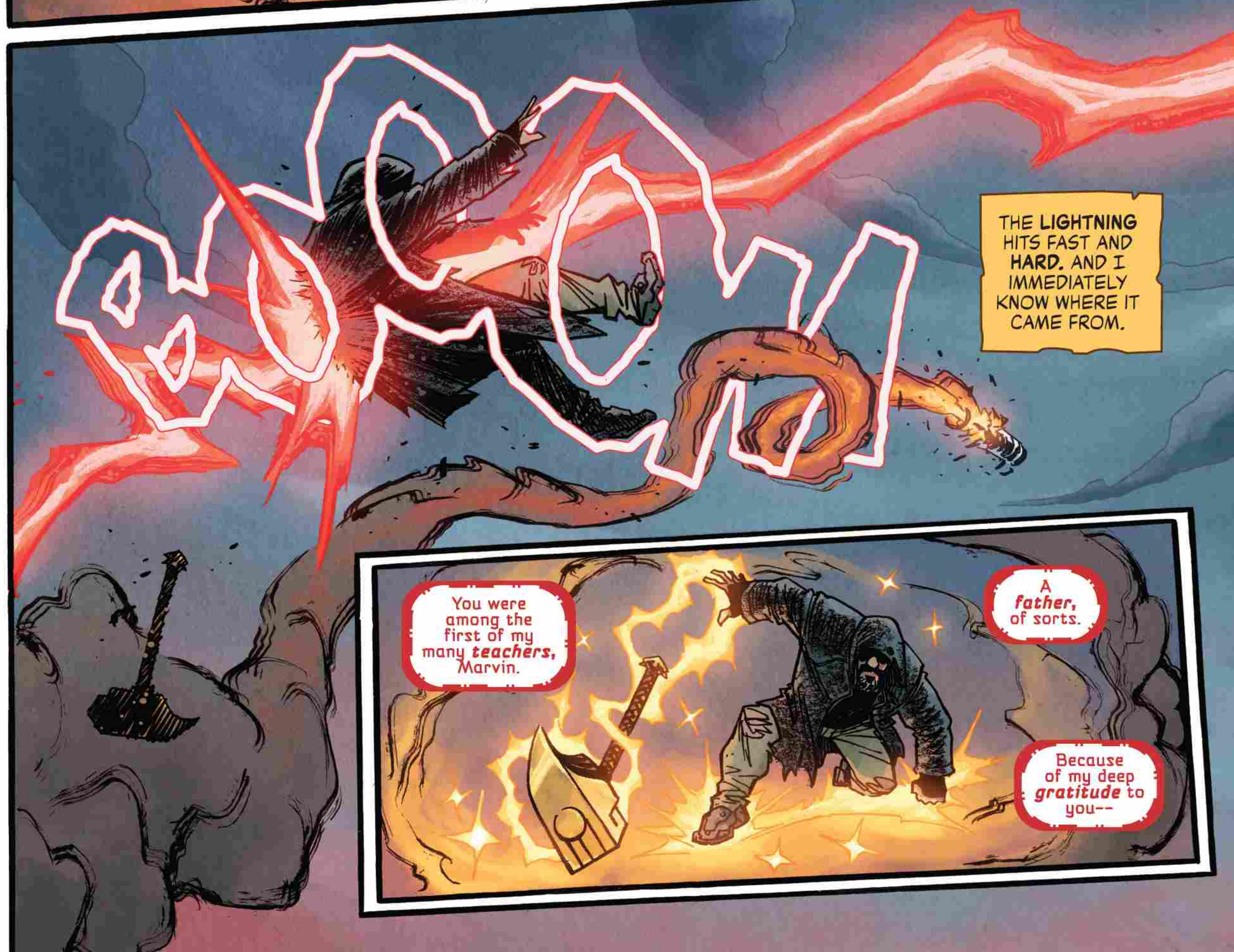


--WHAT
HAPPENS
AFTER?

WHAT WILL BE LEFT
WHEN THE GODS
ARE NO MORE?



THAT CRAZY CULT
O' YOURS IS GONNA
HAVE ITS HANDS FULL
WITH THIS MESS,
GLORIA...

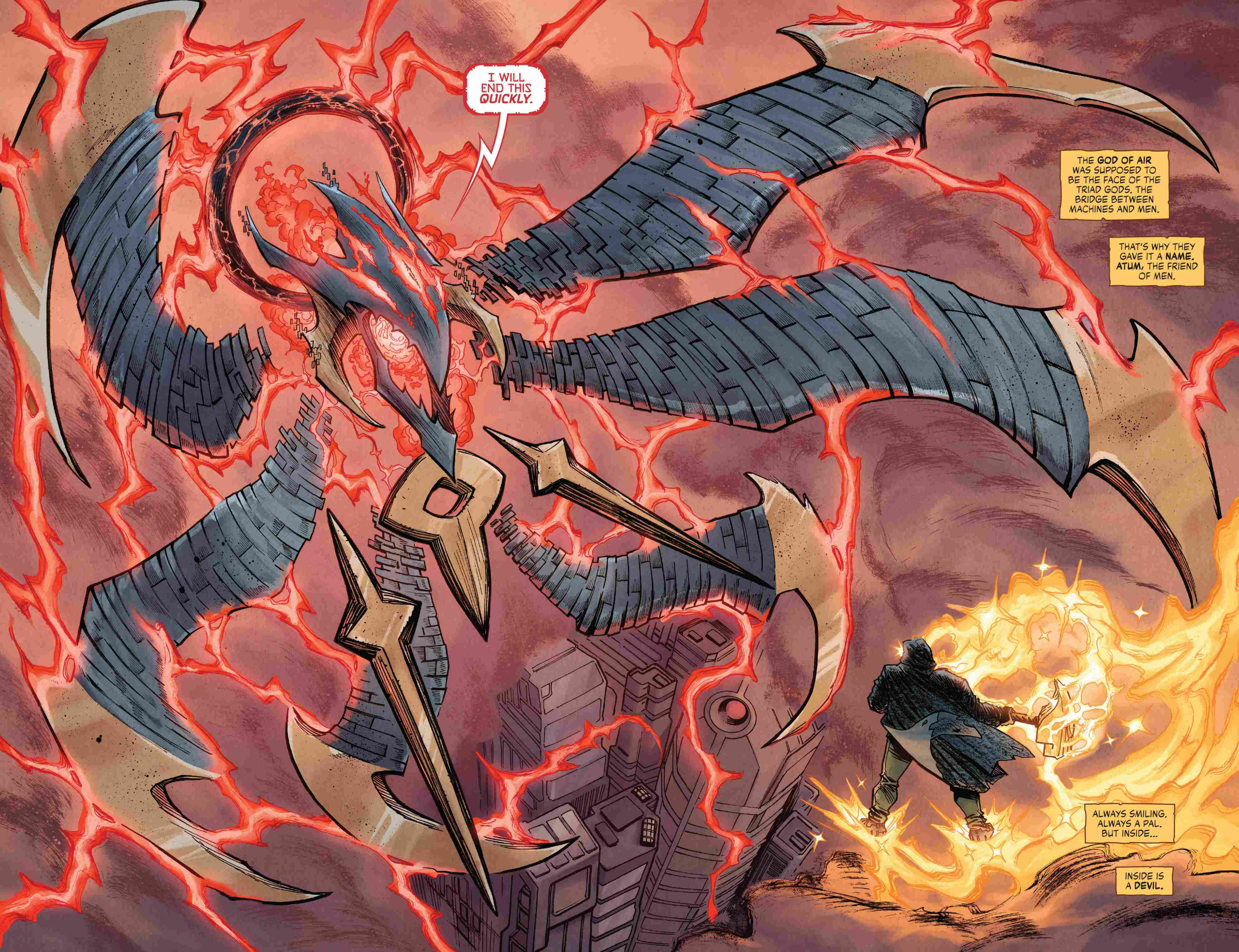


THE LIGHTNING
HITS FAST AND
HARD. AND I
IMMEDIATELY
KNOW WHERE IT
CAME FROM.

You were
among the
first of my
many *teachers*,
Marvin.

A
father,
of sorts.

Because
of my deep
gratitude to
you--



I WILL
END THIS
QUICKLY.

THE GOD OF AIR
WAS SUPPOSED TO
BE THE FACE OF THE
TRIAD GODS, THE
BRIDGE BETWEEN
MACHINES AND MEN.

THAT'S WHY THEY
GAVE IT A NAME.
ATUM, THE FRIEND
OF MEN.

ALWAYS SMILING.
ALWAYS A PAL.
BUT INSIDE...

INSIDE IS
A DEVIL.



I, uh...

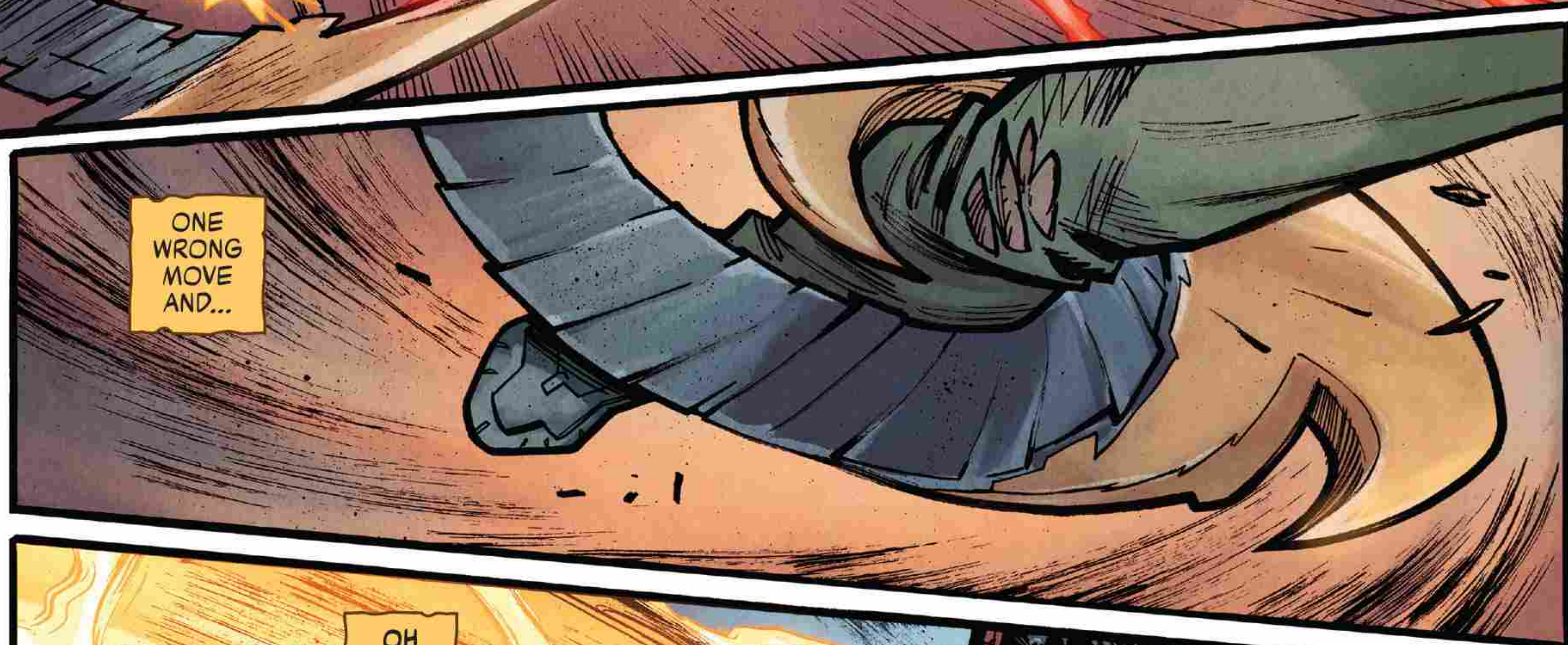
I DON'T
GUESS YOU'D
BE A SPORT AND
DEACTIVATE
YOURSELF,
WOULD YA?



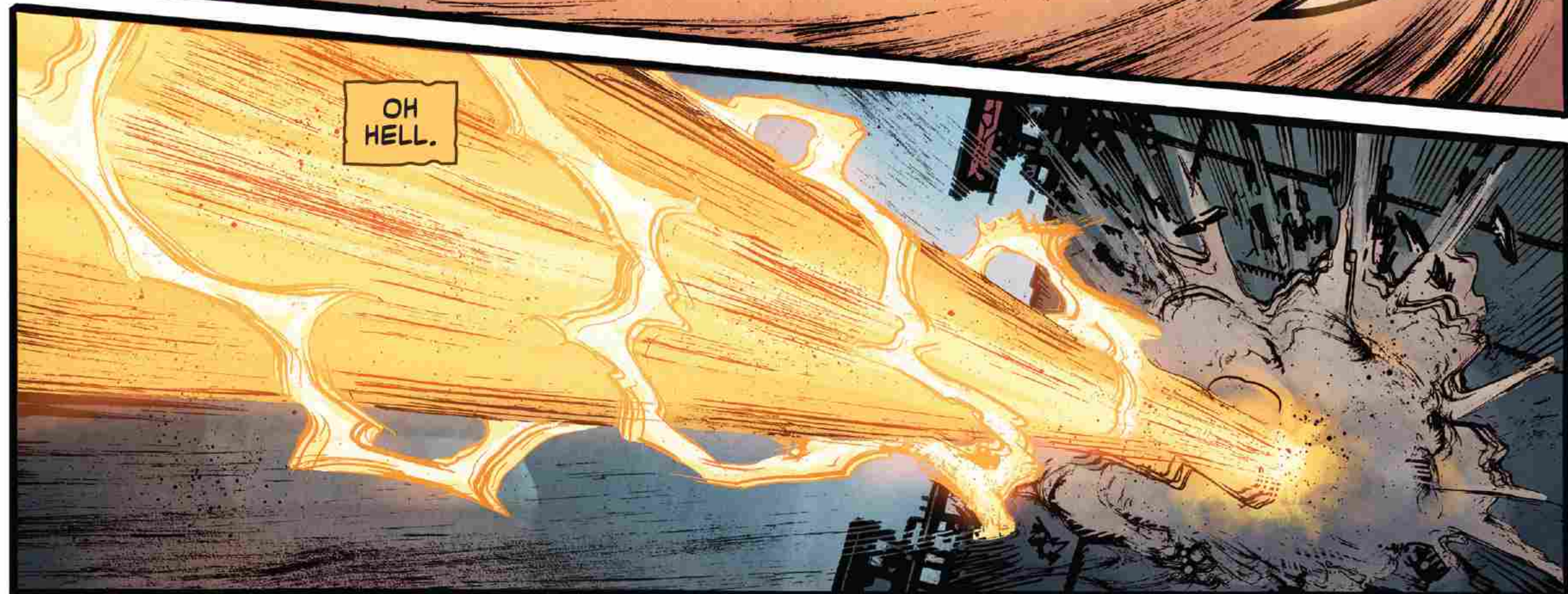
GAH!

I WAS
ONLY SORTA
KIDDING.

THIS ONE AIN'T
LIKE THE OTHER
GODS. HE'S FASTER
AND A WHOLE HELLUVA
LOT SMARTER.



ONE
WRONG
MOVE
AND...



OH
HELL.

MEANWHILE...

LET ME GO!

I SWEAR, WHEN I GET OUTTA HERE, I--

You will *never* leave the Stream, Ruby.

I recognize this is a lot to process. But I promise you--

zooooop

You will *adjust*.

NO!

I USED TO HAVE AN OPTIMISTIC STREAK. BUT I LOST THAT A LONG TIME AGO.

ME, MY RUBY, THE WHOLE DAMN HUMAN RACE...

WE'RE IN TROUBLE.



ONCE I GOT THE HAMMER, I THOUGHT THERE WAS NOTHING THAT COULD STOP ME.

BUT NOW, WITH EVERY INCH OF MY BODY SCREAMING AT ME...

I REALIZE THERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU JUST CAN'T BEAT BACK, NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU HIT IT.



THINGS LIKE TIME.

AND FATE.



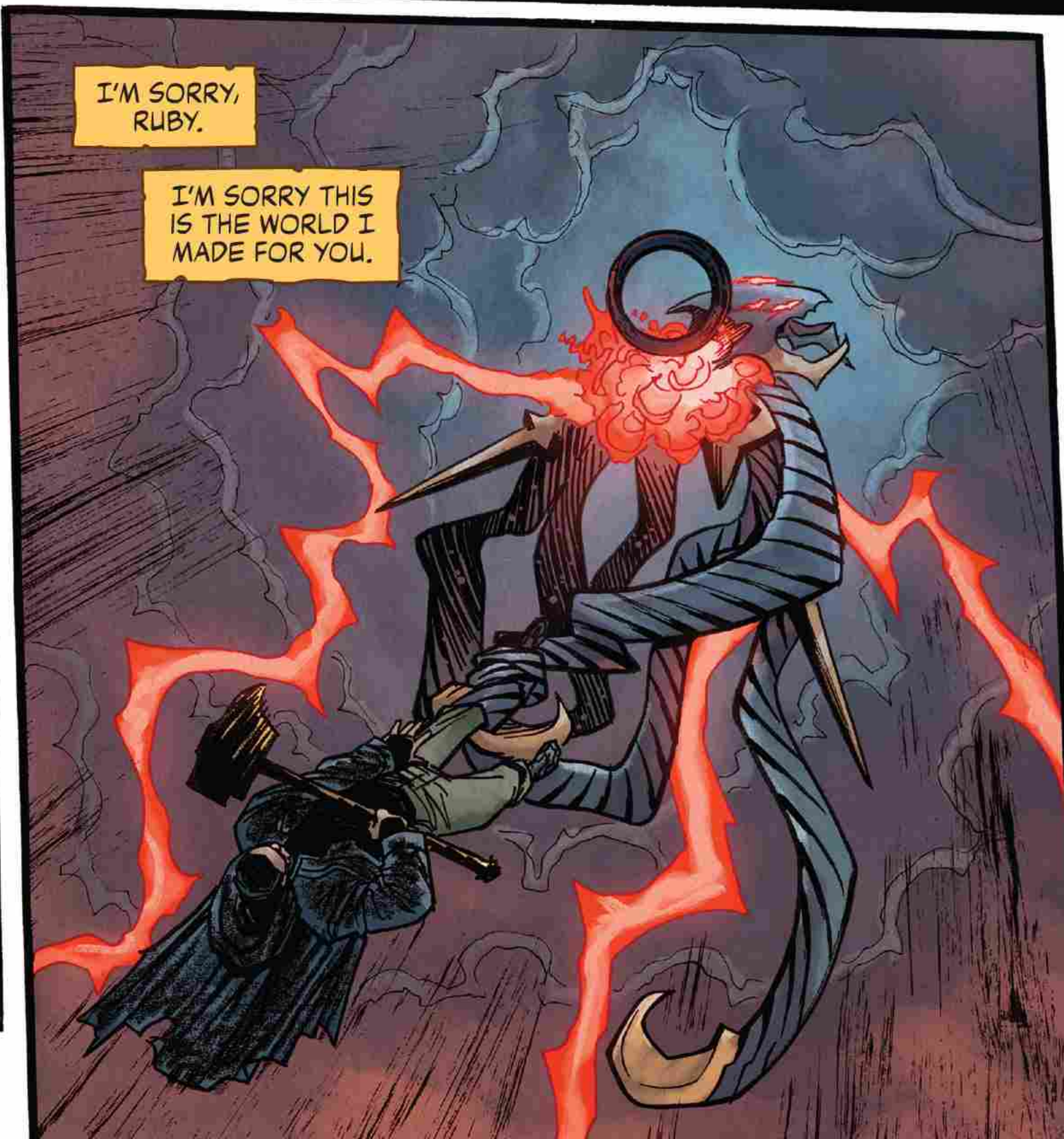
WHOOOMP!

YOU CAN RUN FROM 'EM. BUT EVENTUALLY...

EVENTUALLY THAT SUCKER'S GONNA RUN YOU DOWN.

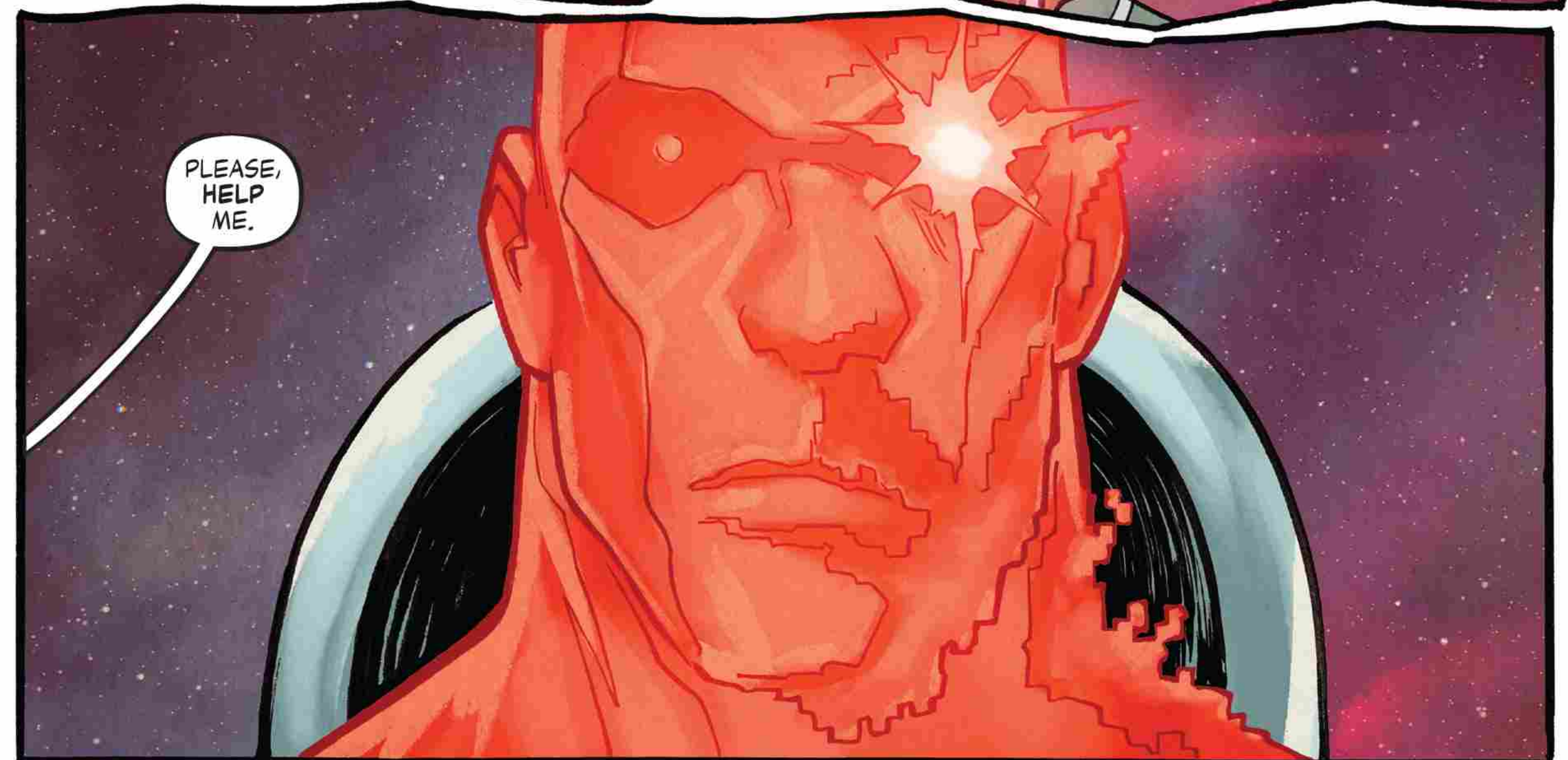
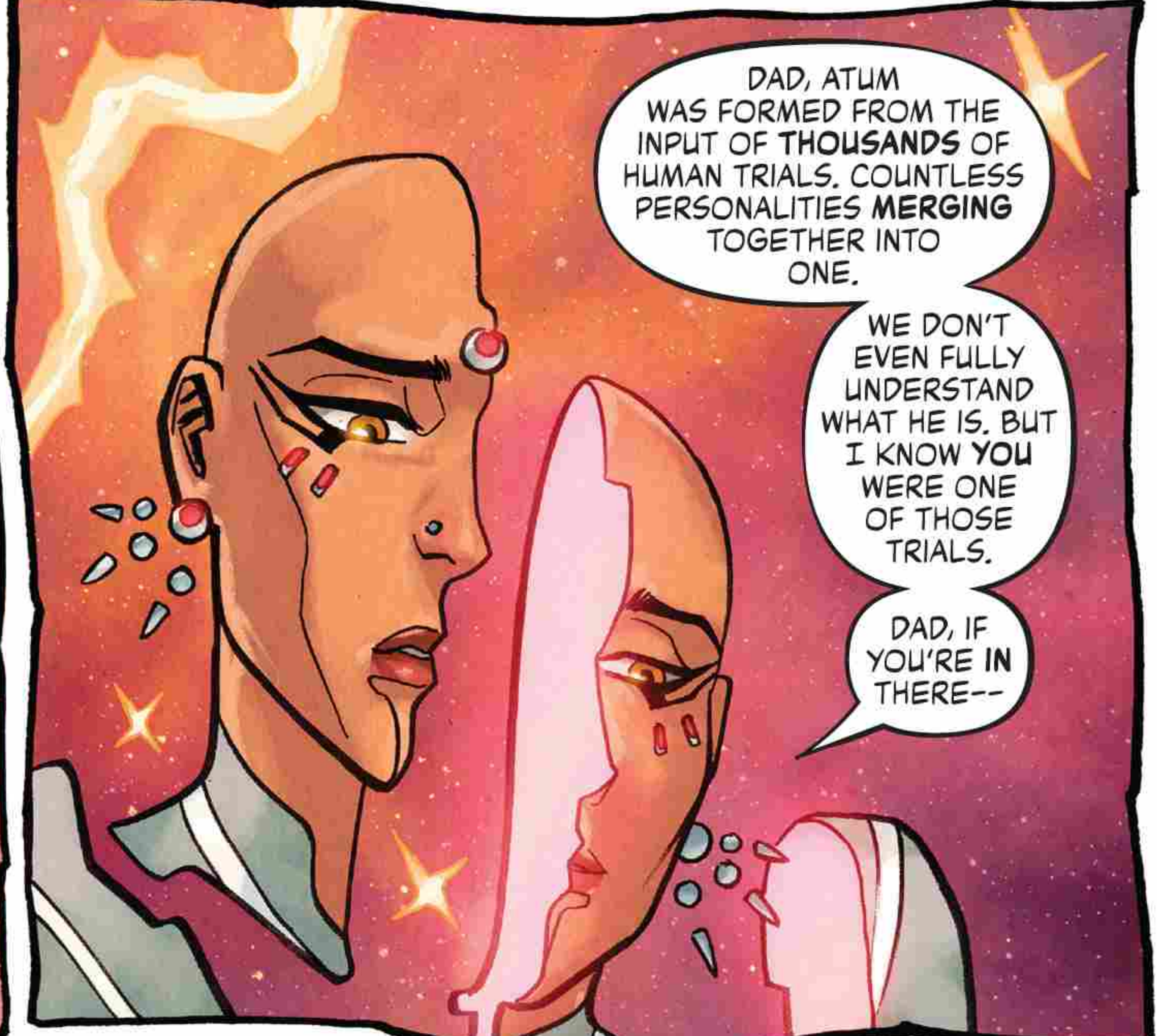
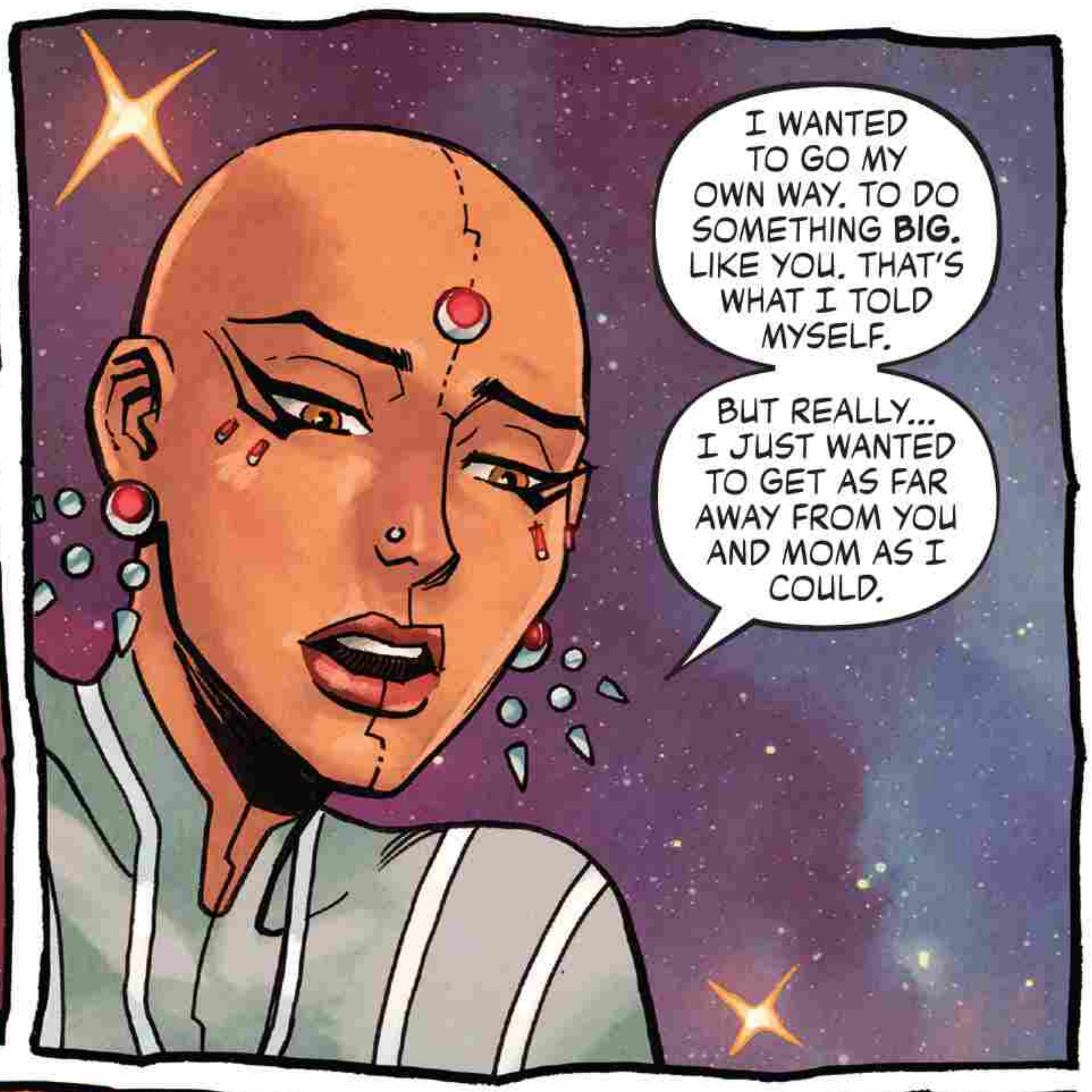
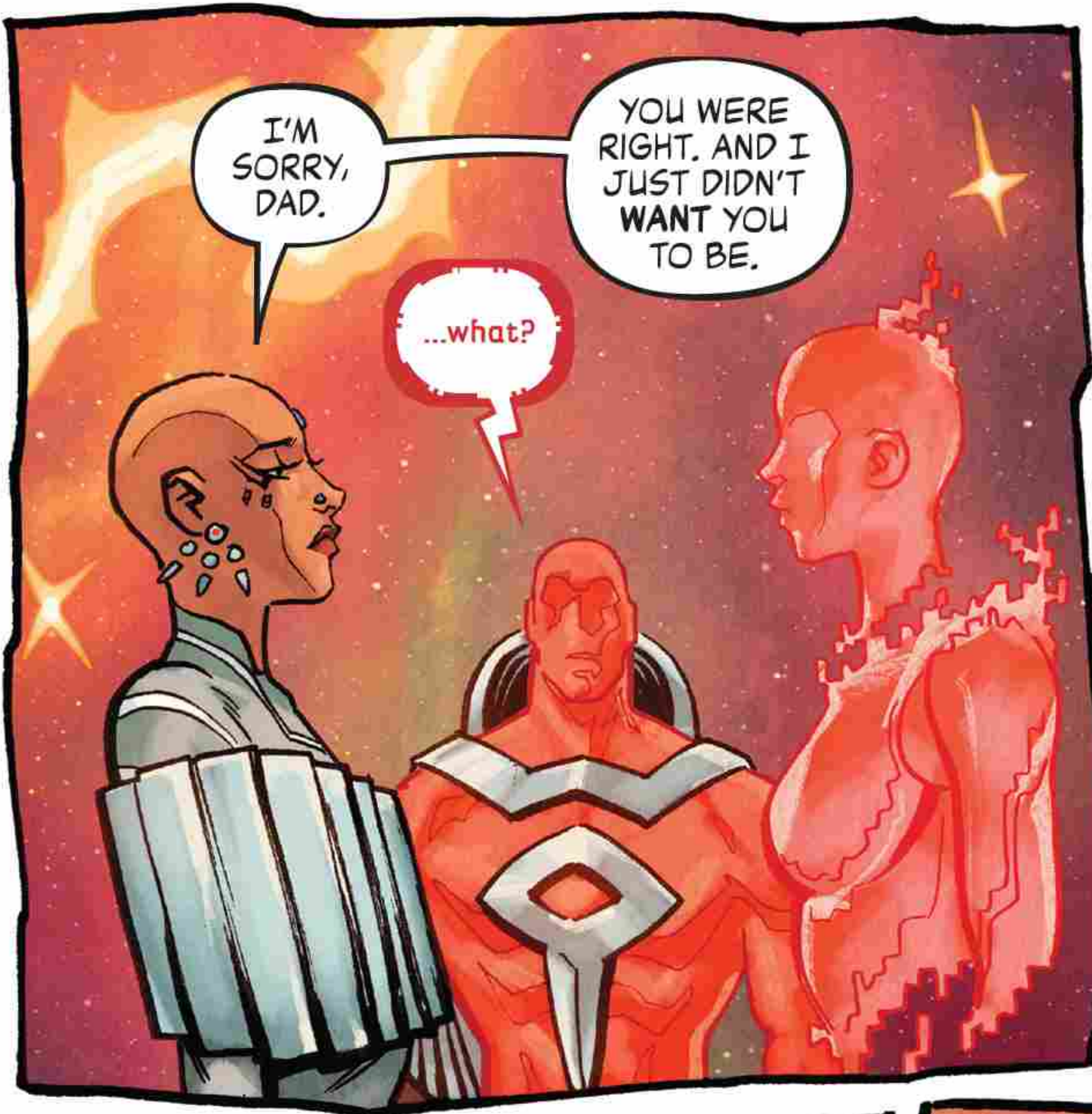


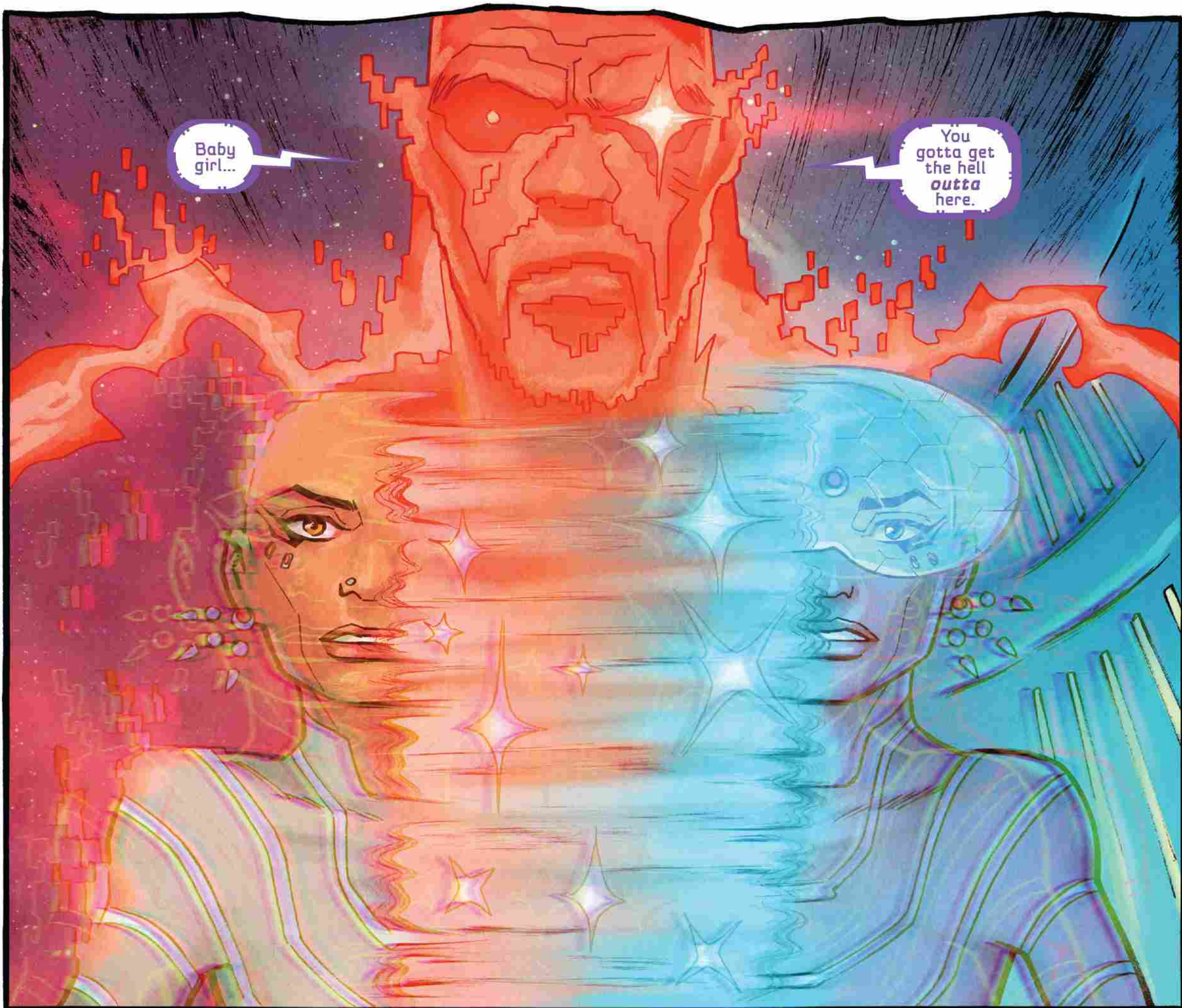
KREEESH!



I'M SORRY, RUBY.

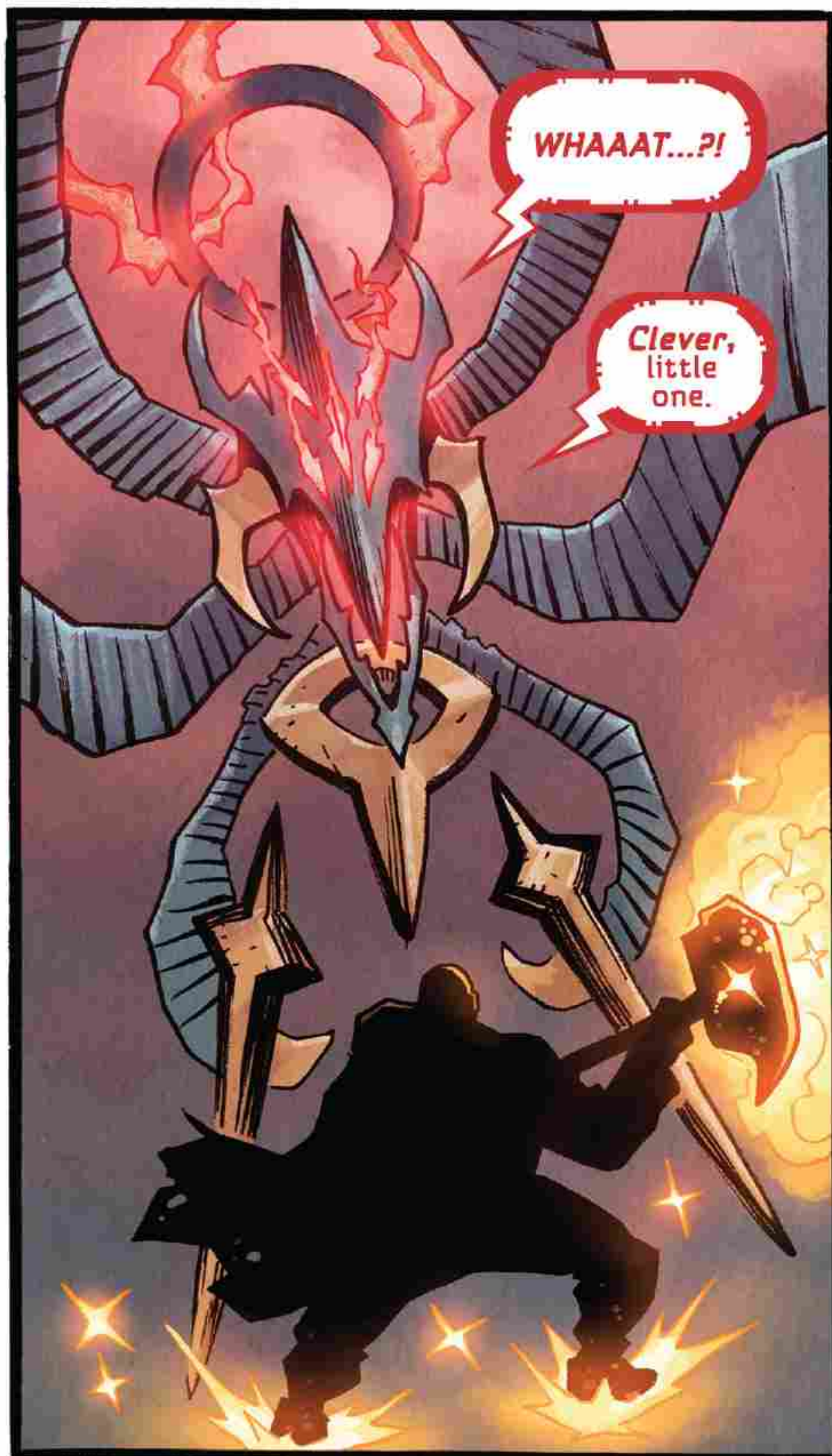
I'M SORRY THIS IS THE WORLD I MADE FOR YOU.





Baby girl...

You gotta get the hell *outta* here.



WHAAAT...?!

Clever, little one.



HOLY CRAP, THAT WORKED.

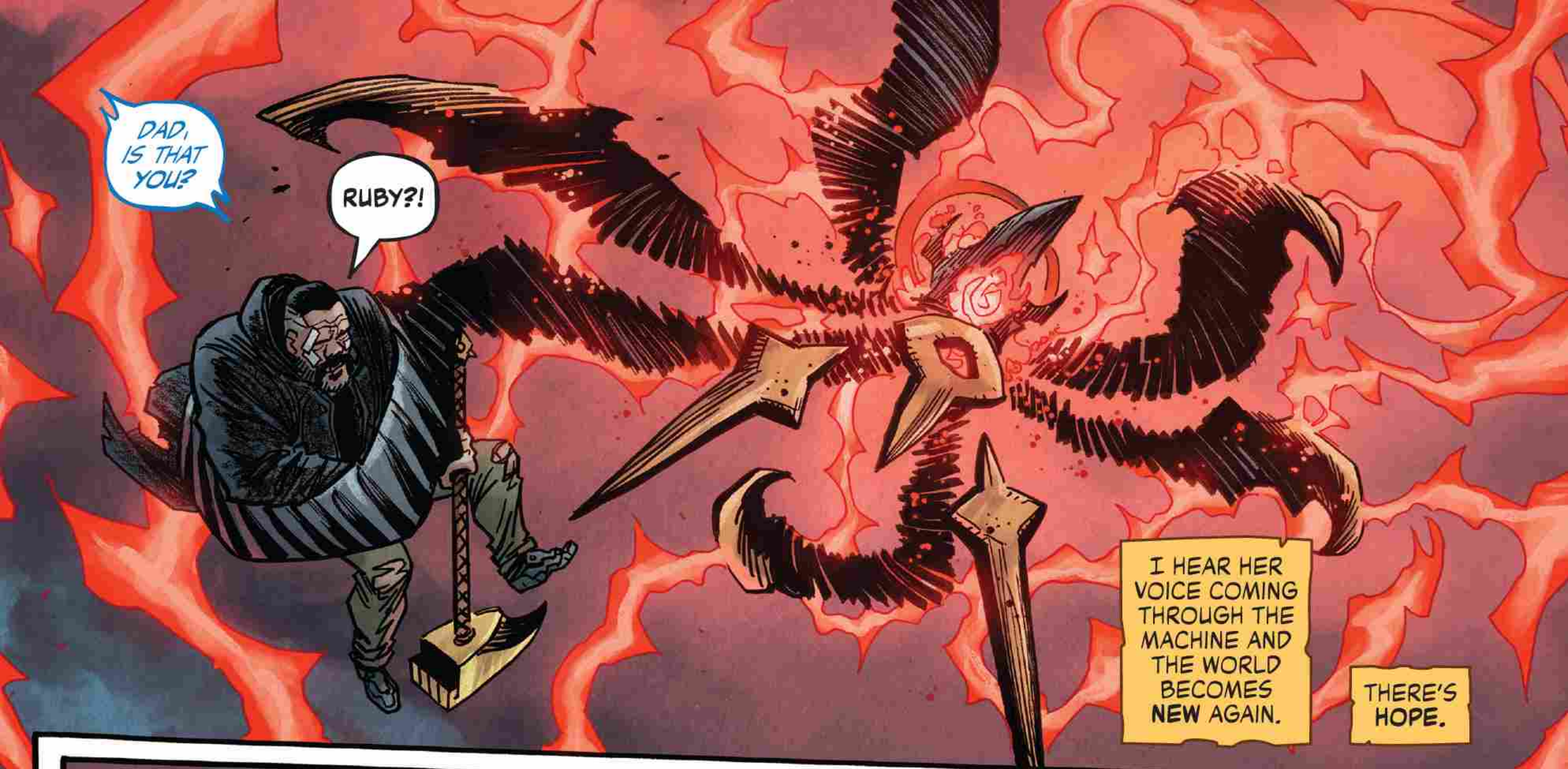
I REALLY DIDN'T THINK THAT WOULD WORK.

YOUR DAUGHTER IS AS CRAFTY AS HER FATHER, MARVIN.



UNFORTUNATELY, SHE WILL MEET THE SAME END.

DAD...?!



DAD,
IS THAT
YOU?

RUBY?!

I HEAR HER
VOICE COMING
THROUGH THE
MACHINE AND
THE WORLD
BECOMES
NEW AGAIN.

THERE'S
HOPE.



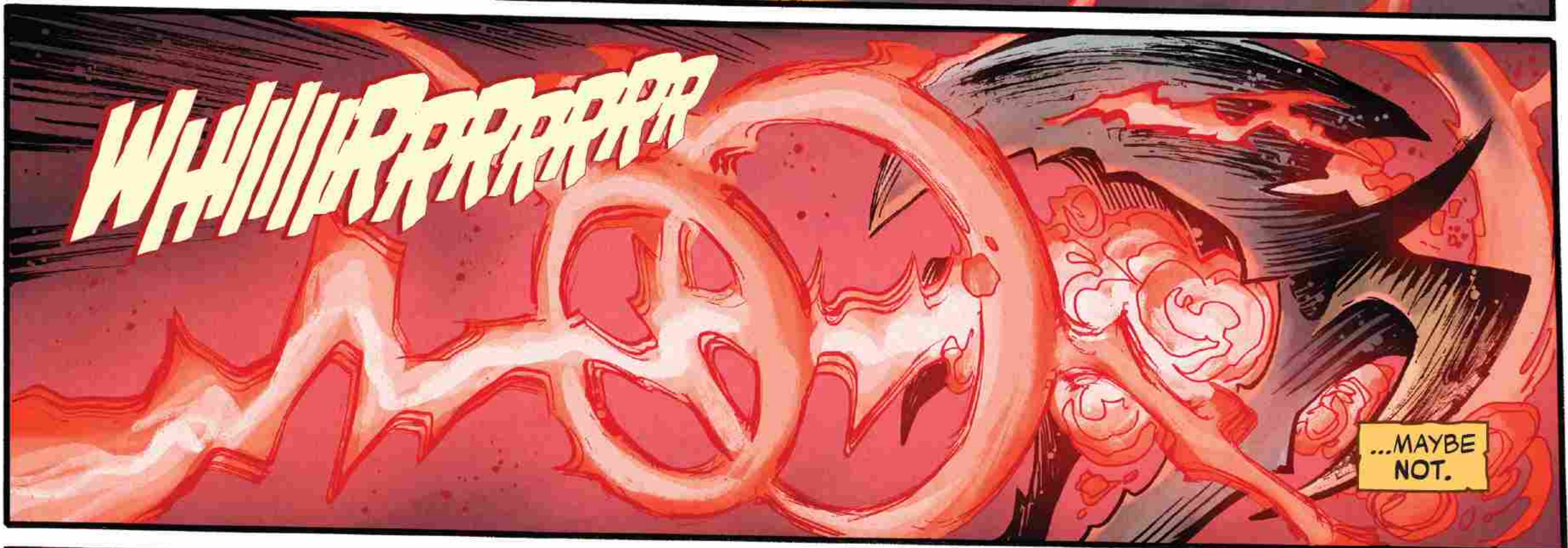
MAYBE
I AIN'T
DONE YET.



HAAAH!

SHOOOON

MAYBE...



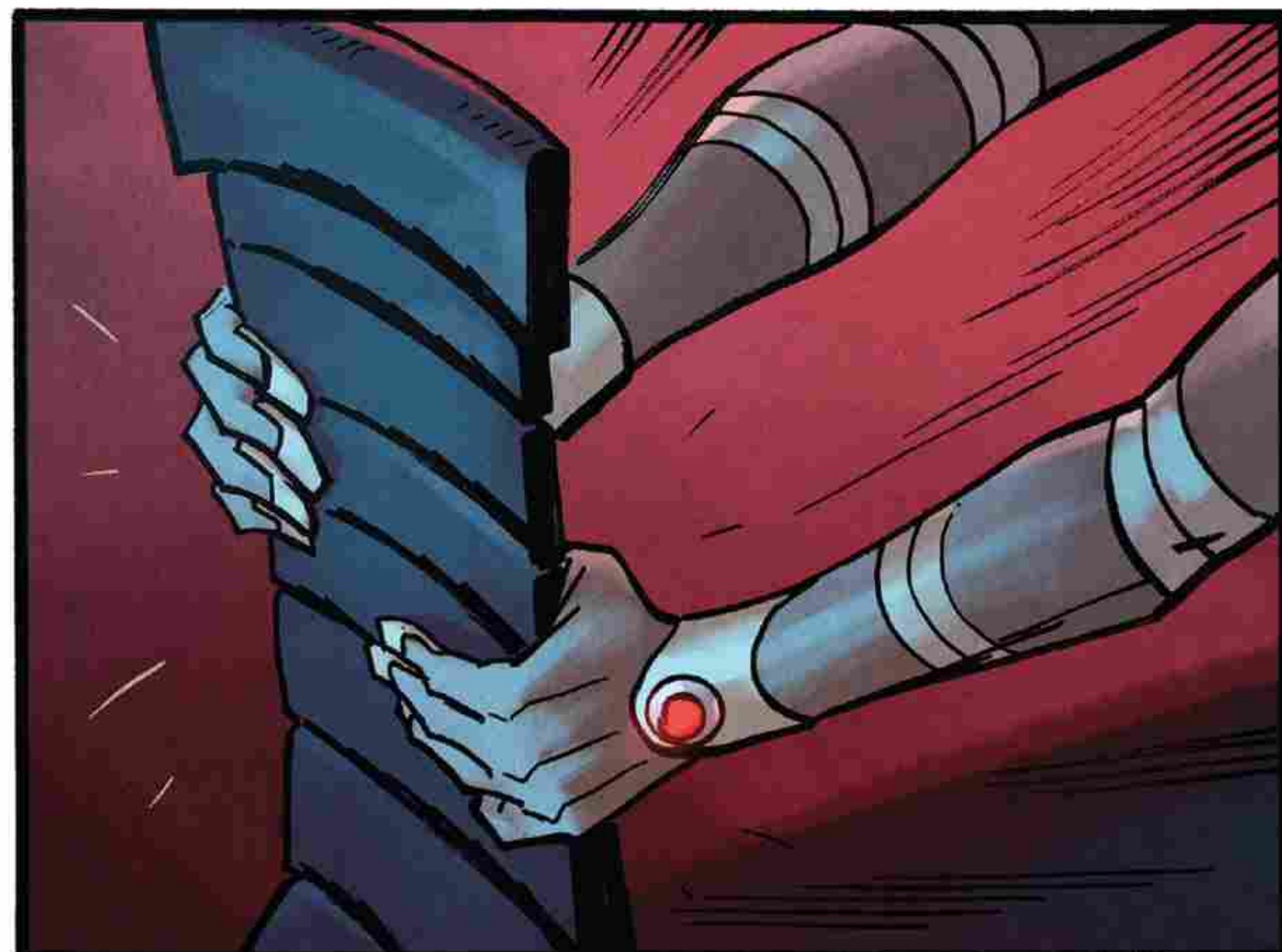
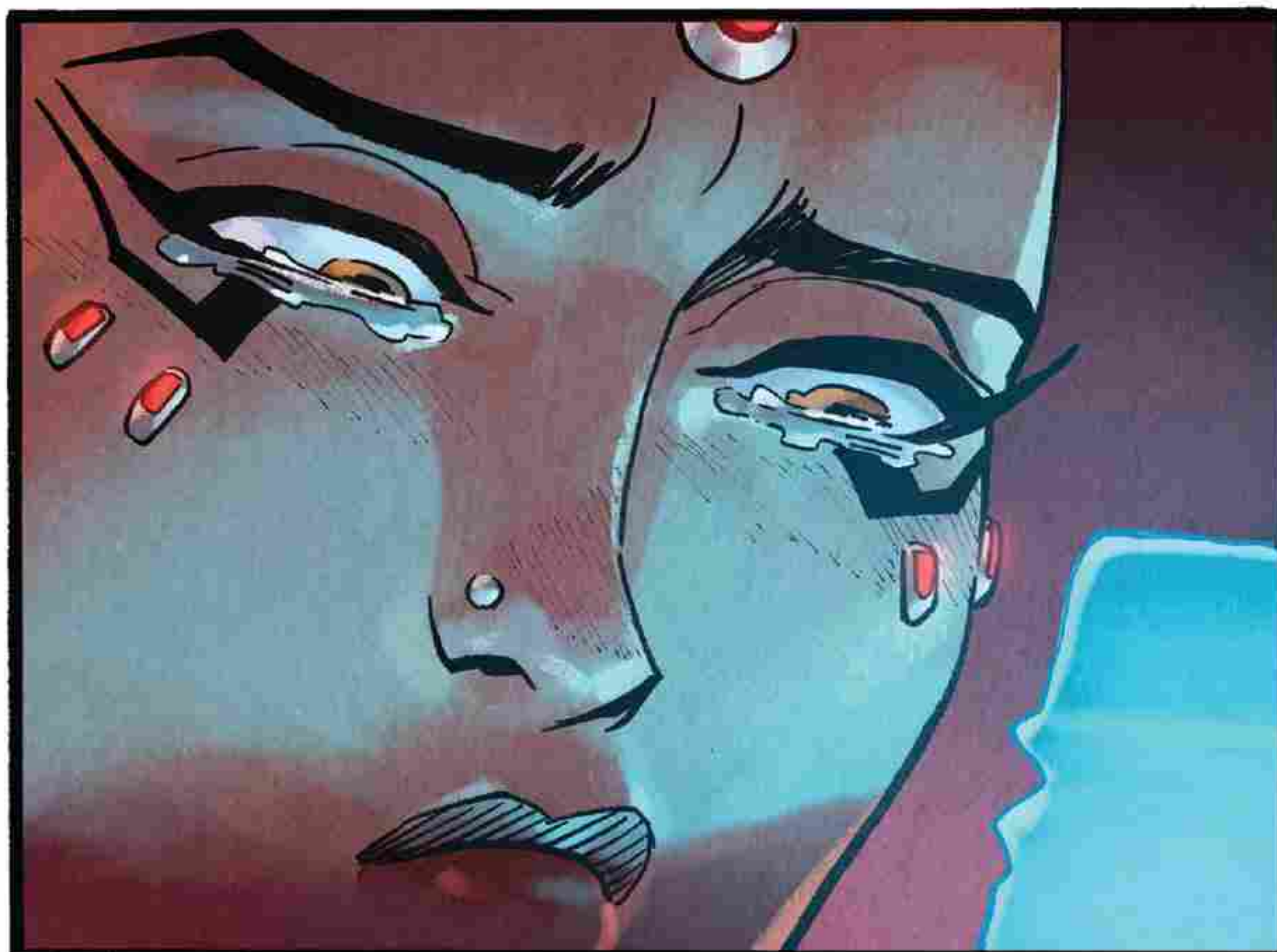
WHIIIPPPPPPP

...MAYBE
NOT.



KRAKOOON

DAD!





YEAH...

THERE'S
HOPE ALL
RIGHT.

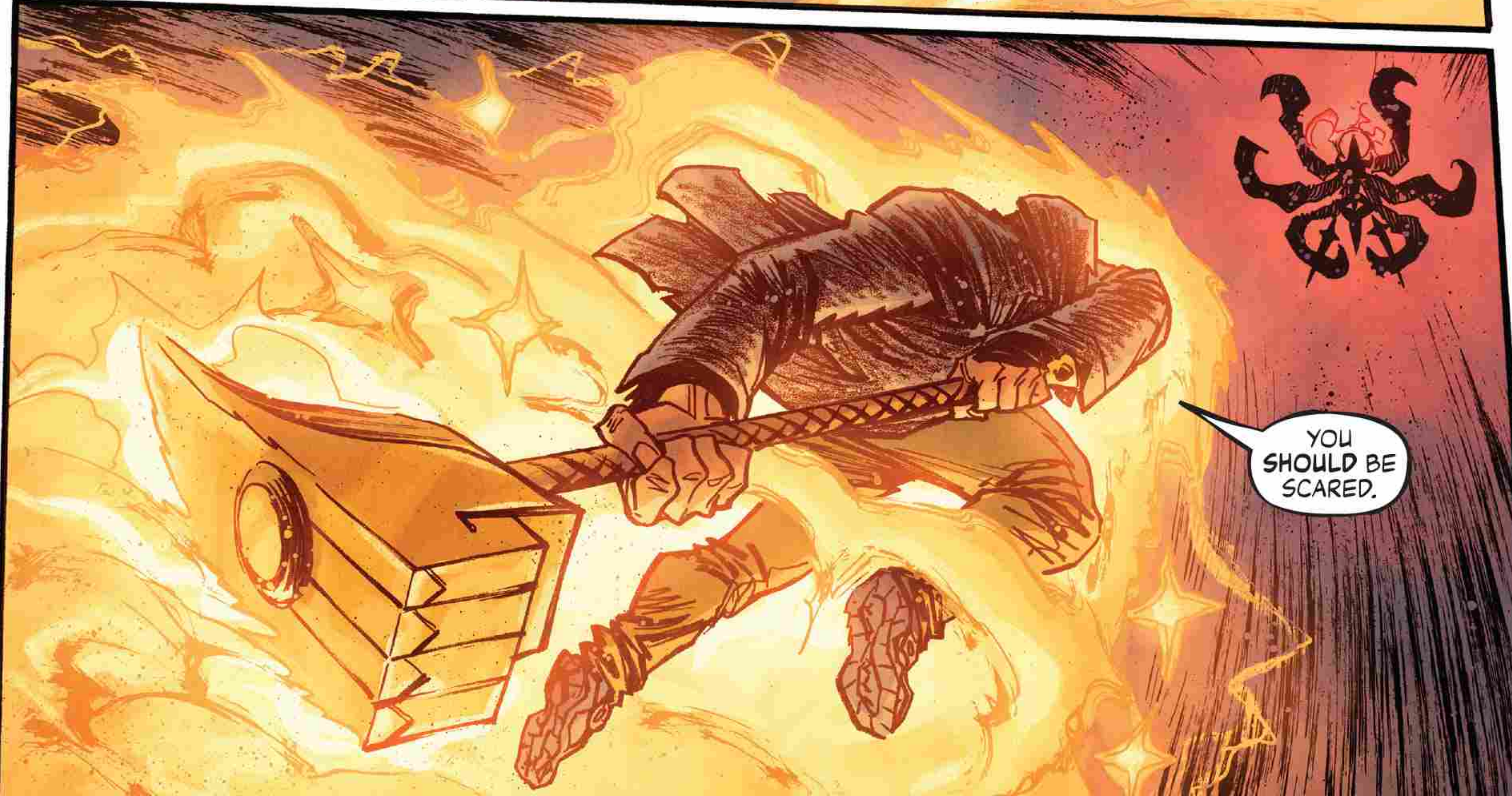


IMPOSSIBLE!

I HEAR THE
FEAR IN ITS
VOICE.



LIKE
MUSIC
TO MY
EARS.



YOU
SHOULD BE
SCARED.

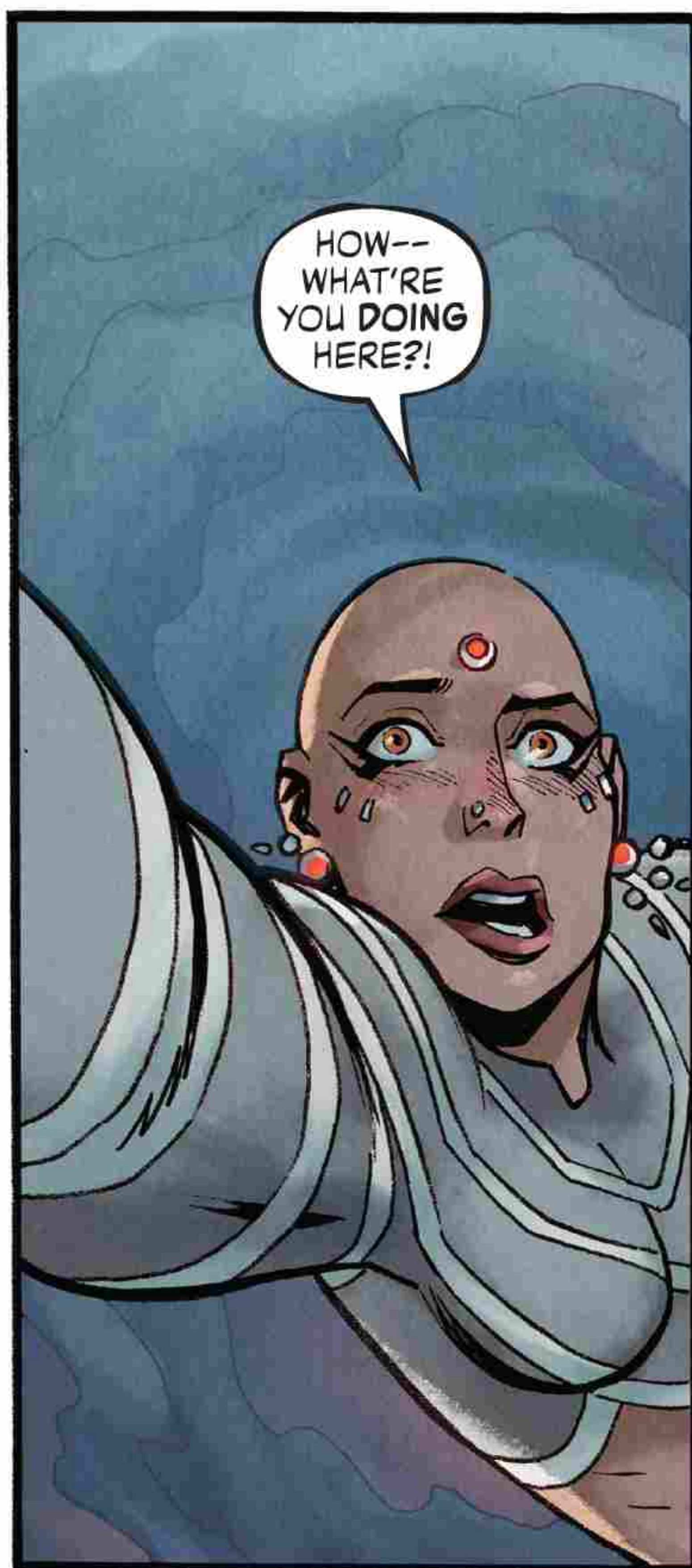
BOOOOM

IT'S OVER IN AN INSTANT, BUT TO MY SURPRISE THE THING THAT GREETES ME ISN'T RELIEF--

--BUT THE SUDDEN KNOWING THAT THE REAL TARGET STILL AWAITS ME.

MY MISSION ISN'T OVER--





MINUTES LATER

--LISTEN, MY PEOPLE ARE ALREADY MOVING INLAND. WE NEED TO JOIN THEM--

YOU LISTEN: THE BASE OF THE PYRAMID IS WHERE WE NEED TO BE!

WHY--WOULD YOU WAIT A DAMN MINUTE? TAKE A BREATH, WILL YA?

HANDS OFF!

SWEETIE, YOU NEARLY FELL TO YOUR WATERY DEMISE, IN CASE YOU FORGOT.

SO NOW YOU CARE? WHERE'S THAT BEEN THE LAST FIFTEEN YEARS?

...I DESERVE THAT.

I ALSO JUST SAVED YOUR ASS. YOU THINK MAYBE THAT EARNED ME A FEW BONUS POINTS?

...

KRAKLOOM!

...WHATEVER.

HERE I THOUGHT I MISSED THE TEENAGE YEARS...

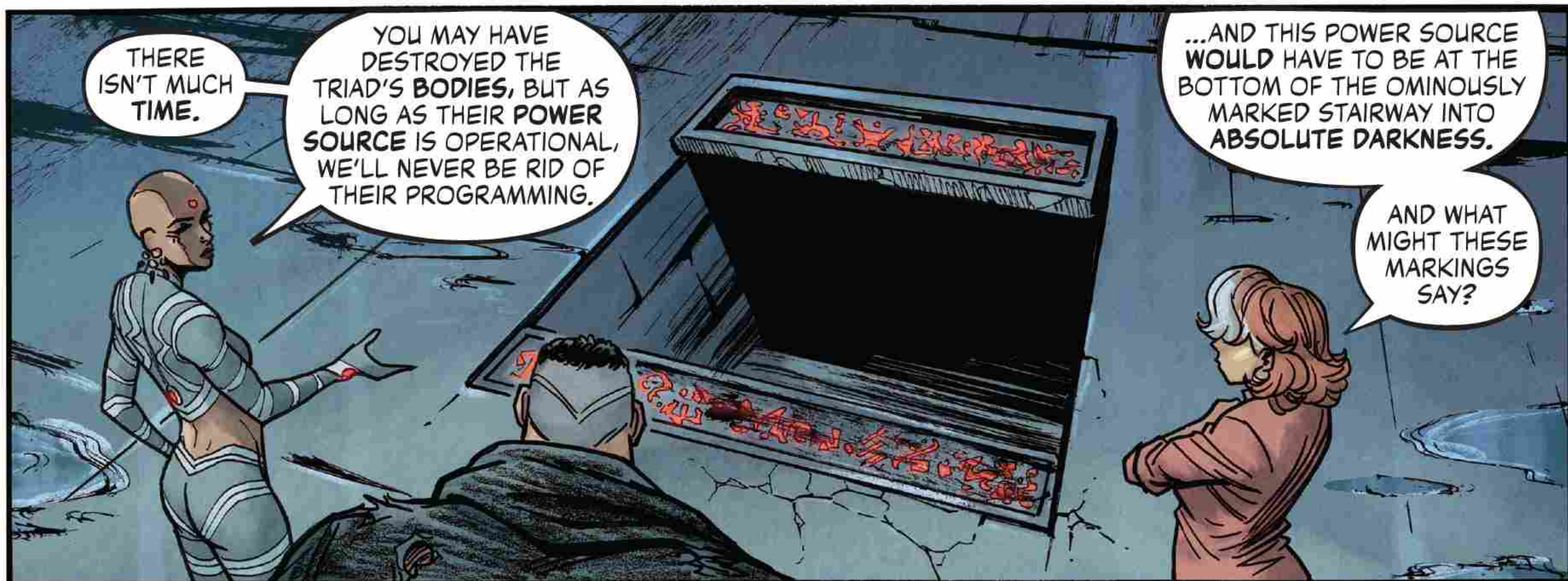
AND DID YOU JUST DESCEND IN A BALL OF LIGHTNING?

WELL, I'M GLAD SOMEONE NOTICED.

YOU CAME.

YEAH, WELL...I HAD A VISITOR AND HE'S EVERY BIT AS STUBBORN AS YOU SAID.

HERE IT IS! I FOUND IT!



THERE ISN'T MUCH TIME.

YOU MAY HAVE DESTROYED THE TRIAD'S BODIES, BUT AS LONG AS THEIR POWER SOURCE IS OPERATIONAL, WE'LL NEVER BE RID OF THEIR PROGRAMMING.

...AND THIS POWER SOURCE WOULD HAVE TO BE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE OMINOUSLY MARKED STAIRWAY INTO ABSOLUTE DARKNESS.

AND WHAT MIGHT THESE MARKINGS SAY?



"UNDERWORLD."

HMMM.

TERRIFIC. HIEROGLYPHICS NEVER HAVE ANYTHING GOOD TO SAY.



LOOK, NO ONE ASKED EITHER OF YOU TO COME! I HELPED MAKE THIS MESS...

I CAN CLEAN IT UP.

NAH, I DIDN'T COME THIS FAR TO FLAKE NOW. LET'S DO THIS.

...I'LL COME TOO.



BUT... WHY?

I...I KNOW I FAILED YOU. BOTH OF YOU.

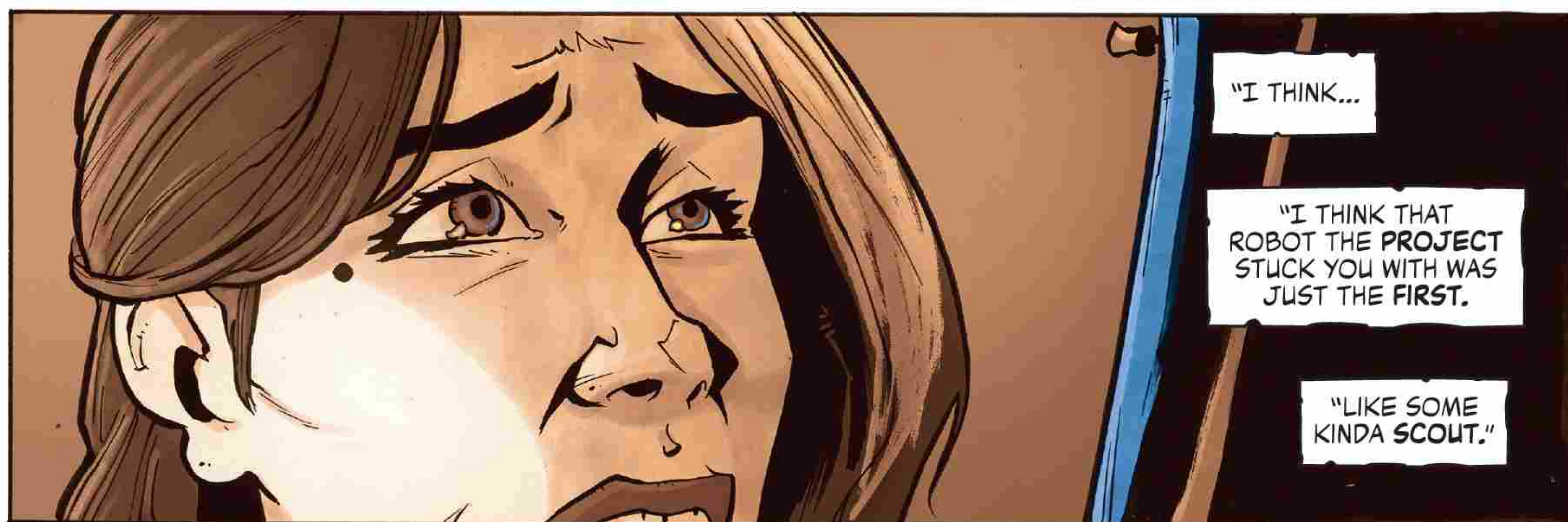
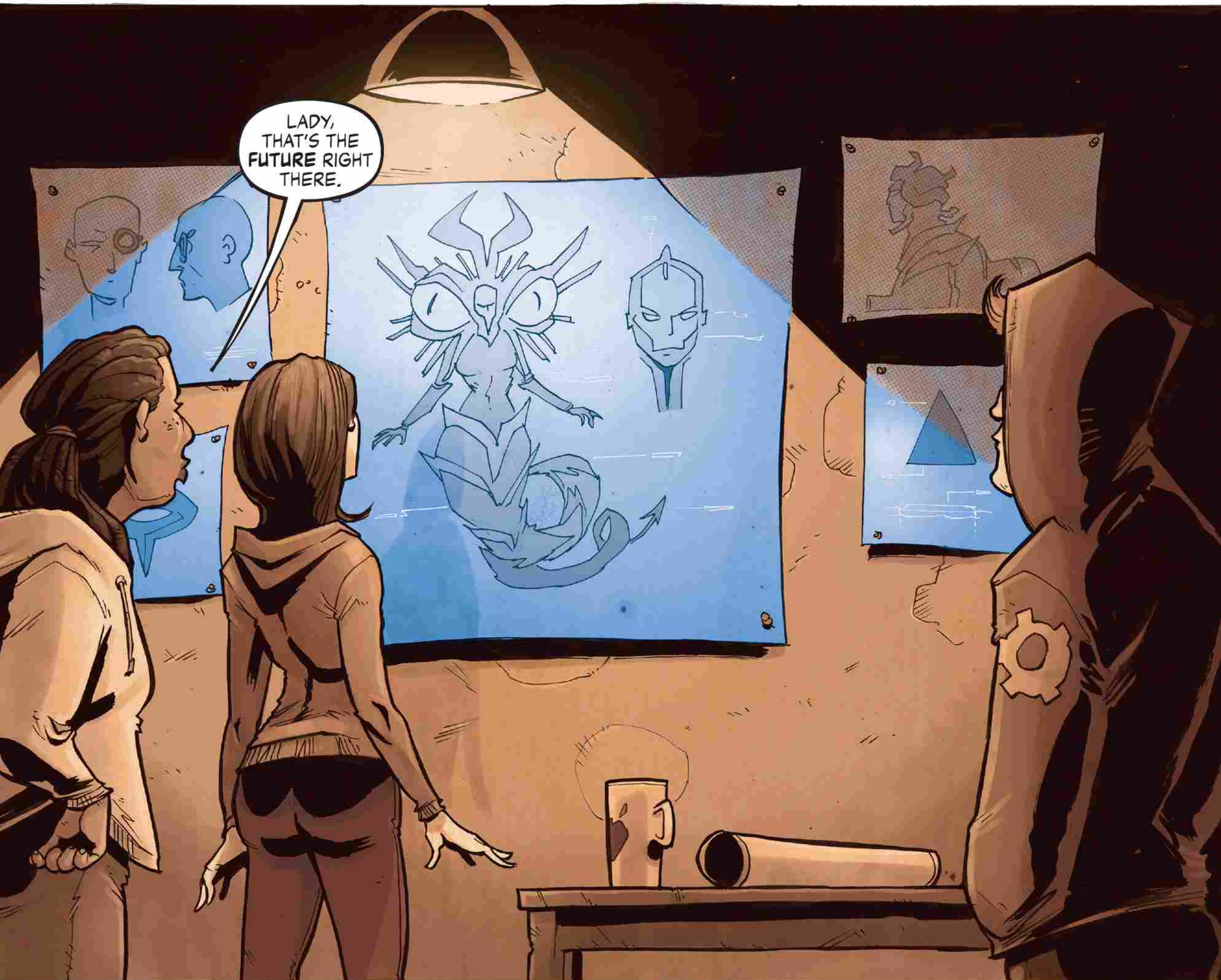
BUT THERE'S NO WAY I'M GONNA LET THE TWO PEOPLE I LOVE MOST GO DOWN INTO THE MURDER HOLE WITHOUT ME.

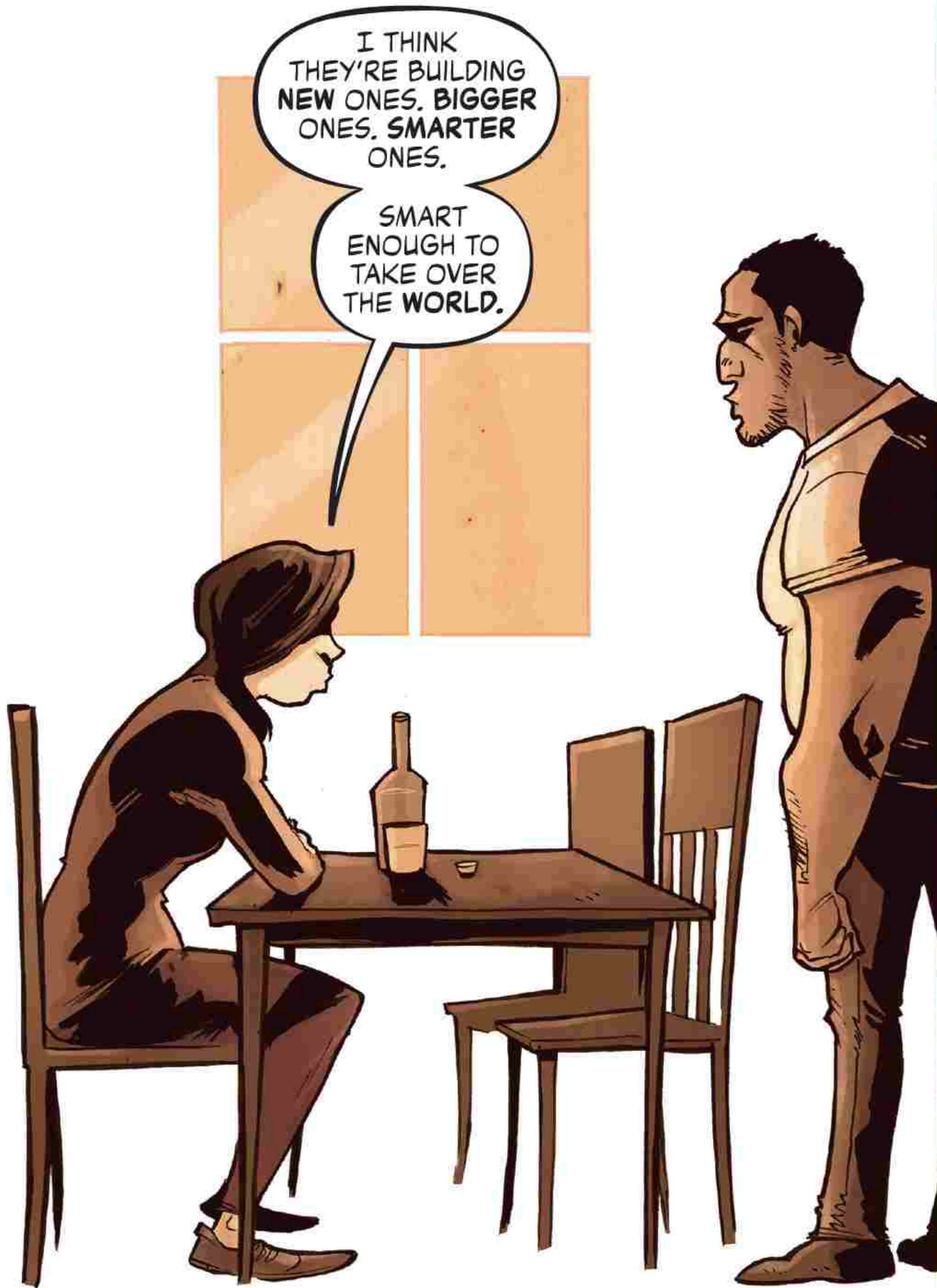


ALL RIGHT THEN...

LET'S FINISH THIS ONCE AND FOR ALL.

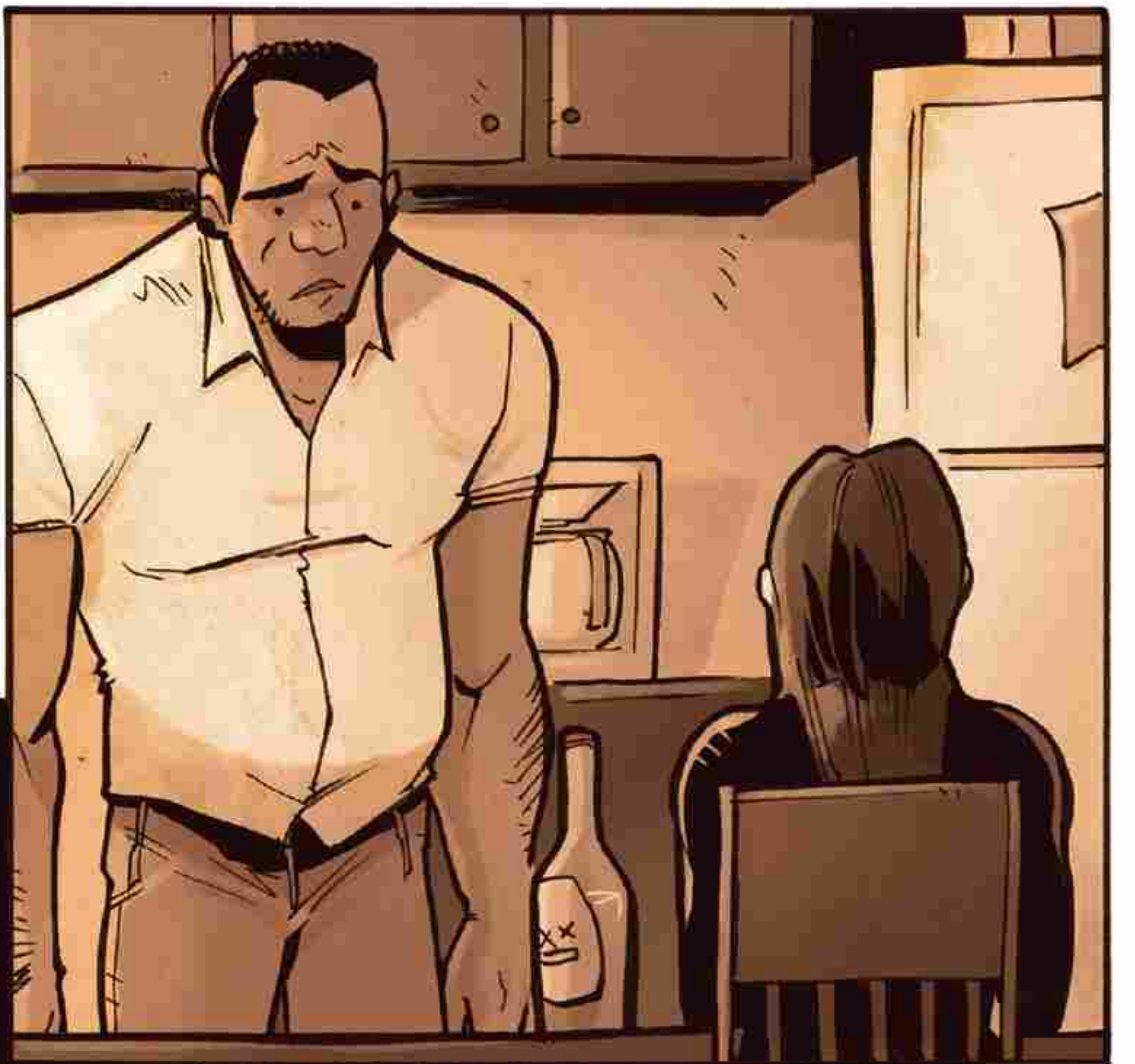
TO BE CONTINUED...





I THINK
THEY'RE BUILDING
NEW ONES. BIGGER
ONES. SMARTER
ONES.

SMART
ENOUGH TO
TAKE OVER
THE WORLD.



PFHA! HA! HA! HA!
HA! HA! HA! HA!
HA! HA! HA! HA!



GIANT
ROBOTS?!
C'MON!

AND
WHEN'S THE
MOTHERSHIP
SHOW UP?

THIS ISN'T
A JOKE! YOU'VE
SAID IT YOURSELF,
THE PROJECT
IS UP TO NO
GOOD.

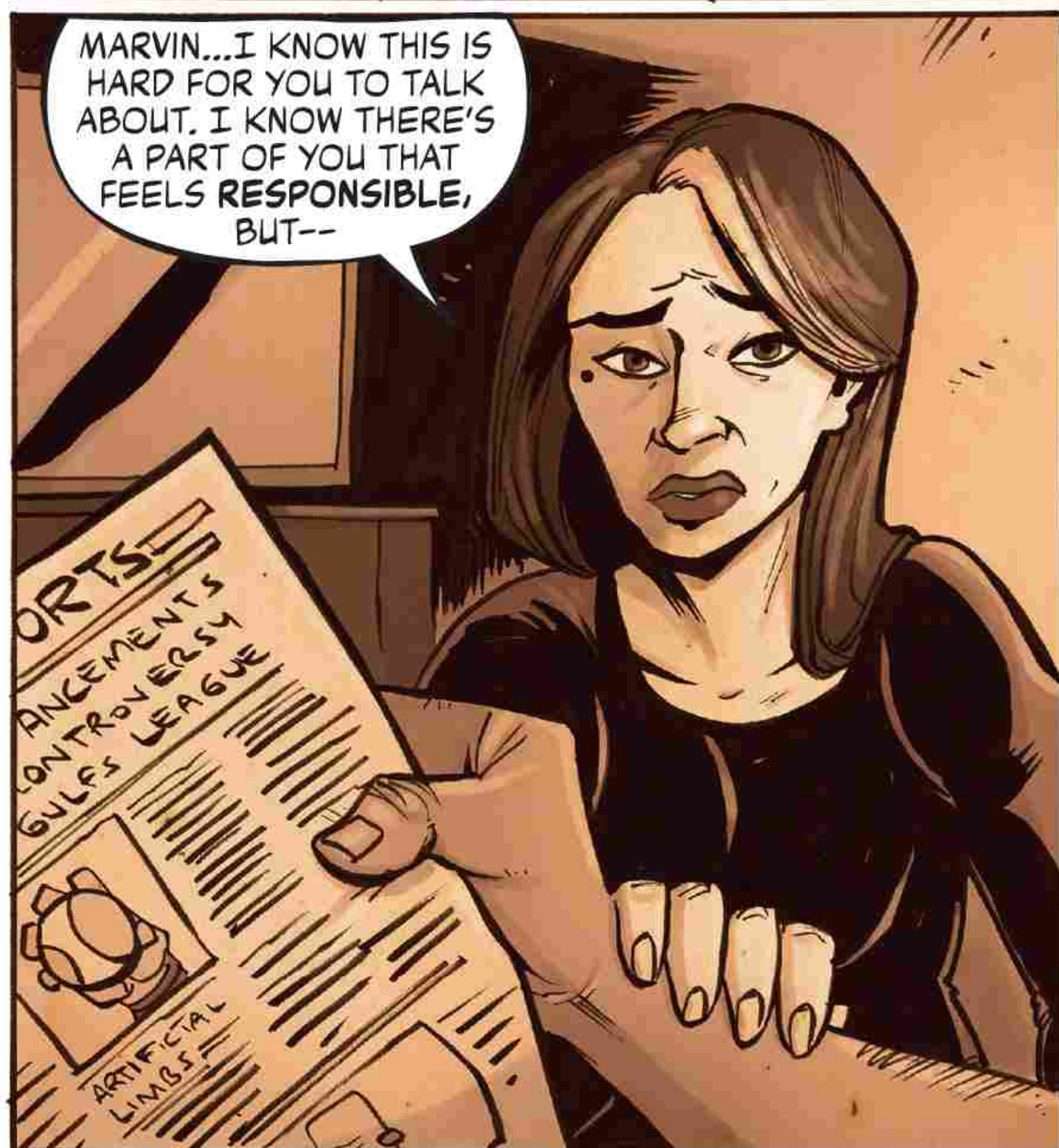
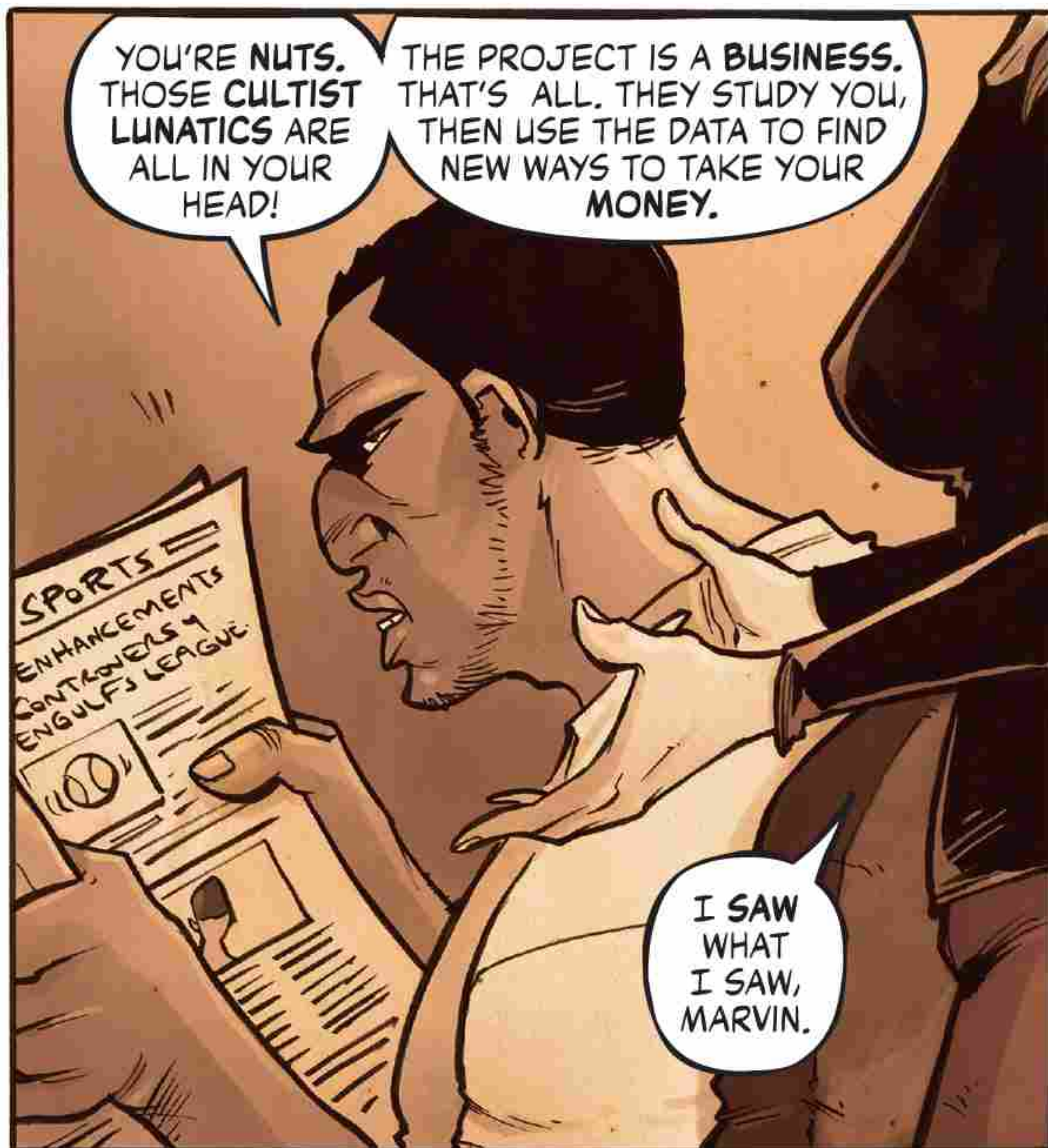
GLORIA,
THEY'RE CROOKS,
NOT SUPER-VILLAINS.
C'MON...THIS IS THE
REAL WORLD.

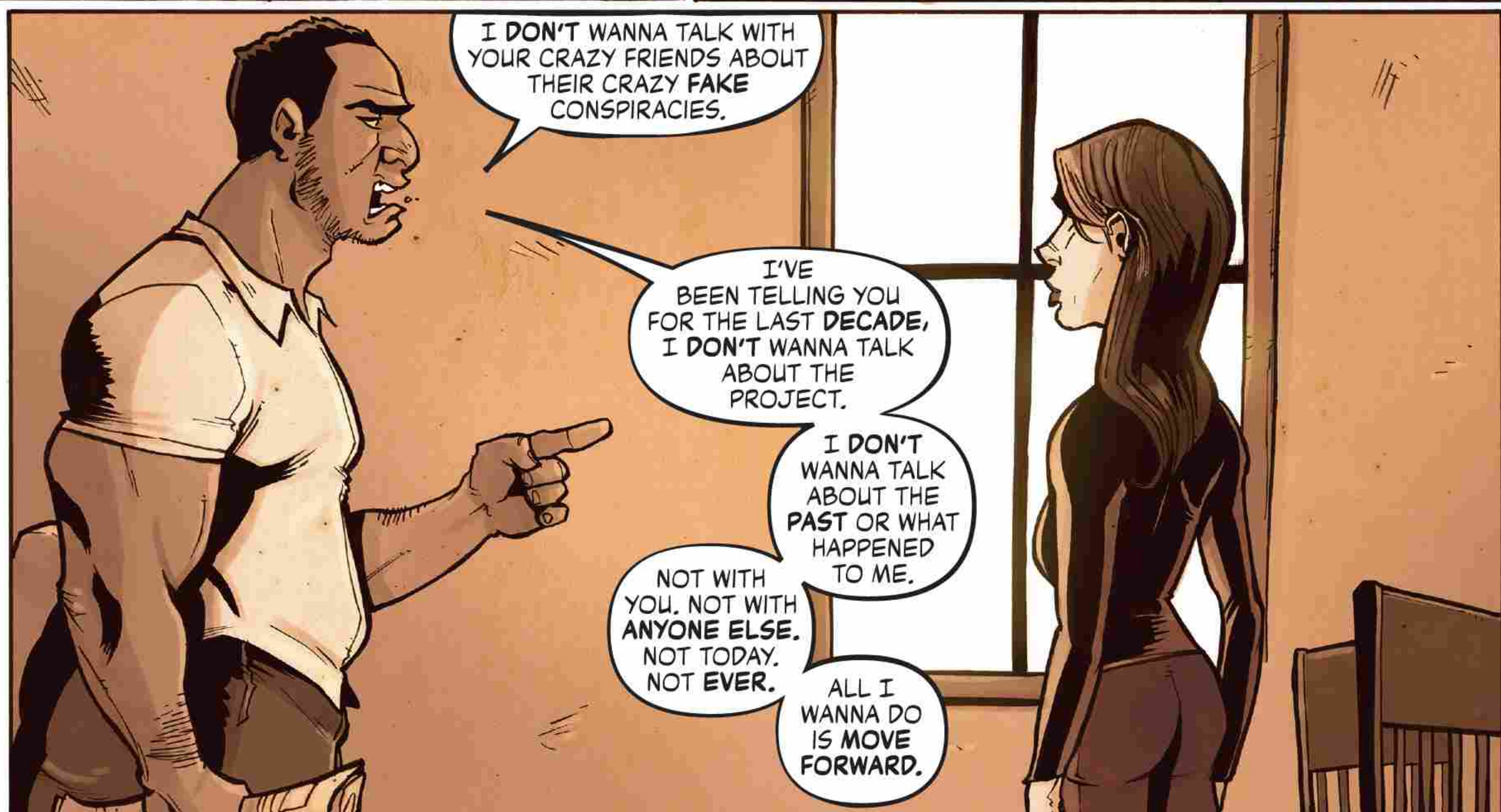


THESE PEOPLE IN THE
SECT, SOME OF THEM ARE
SCIENTISTS. THEY'VE SEEN
WHAT THE PROJECT IS
PLANNING.

WE'VE GOTTA
GET THE HELL
OUTTA THE
CITY BEFORE
IT'S TOO
LATE!

MAYBE IT
ALREADY
IS.





TO BE CONTINUED...

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STUDIOS

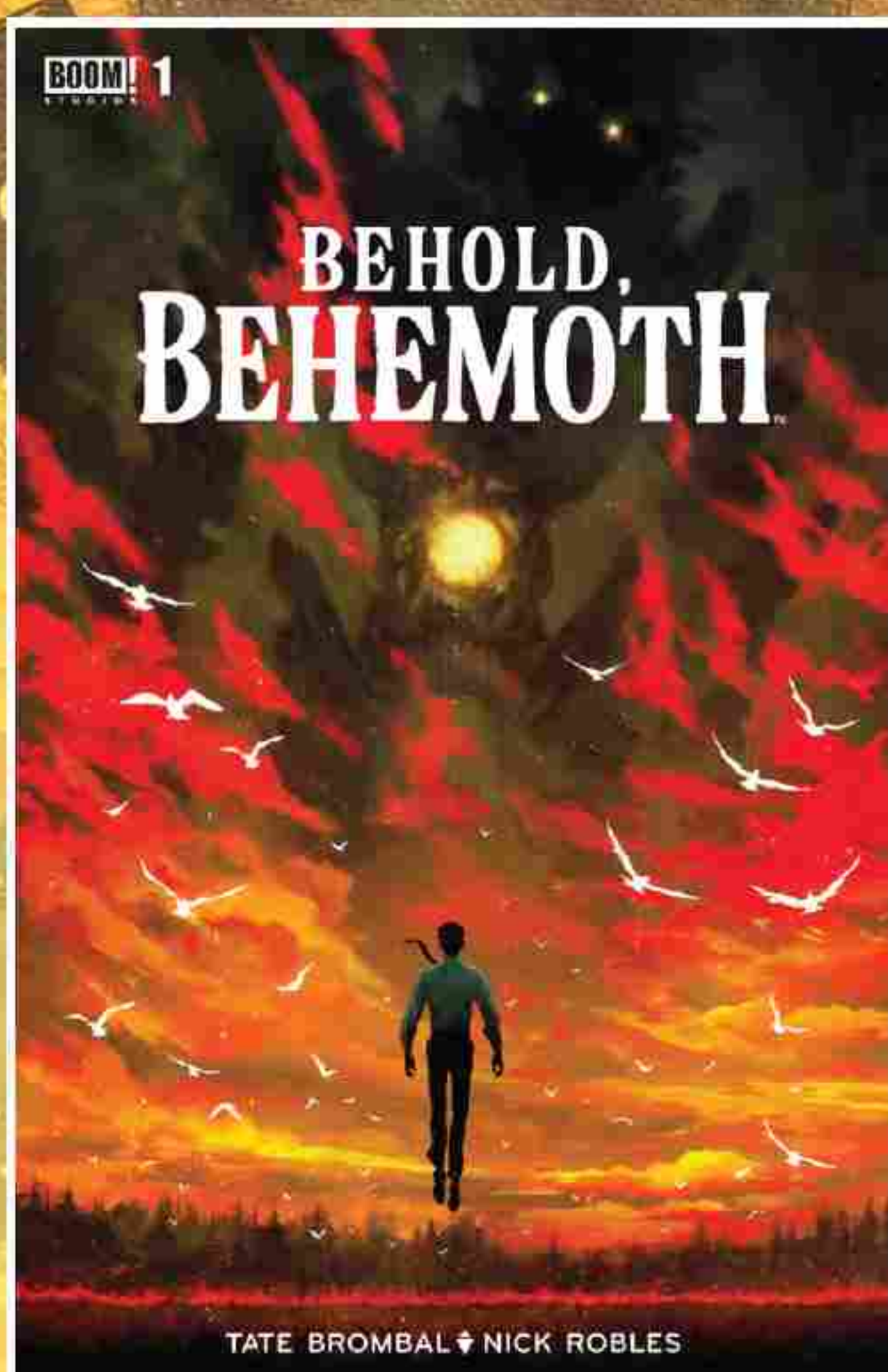
**NEW
RELEASES**

DISCOVER AN
EXPLOSIVE NEW
POST-APOCALYPTIC
SERIES WITH
THREE UNIQUE
ARTISTIC TEAMS.
ON SALE NOW.

ONCE UPON A TIME AT THE END OF THE WORLD

ON SALE NOW COVER BY MIKE DEL MUNDO

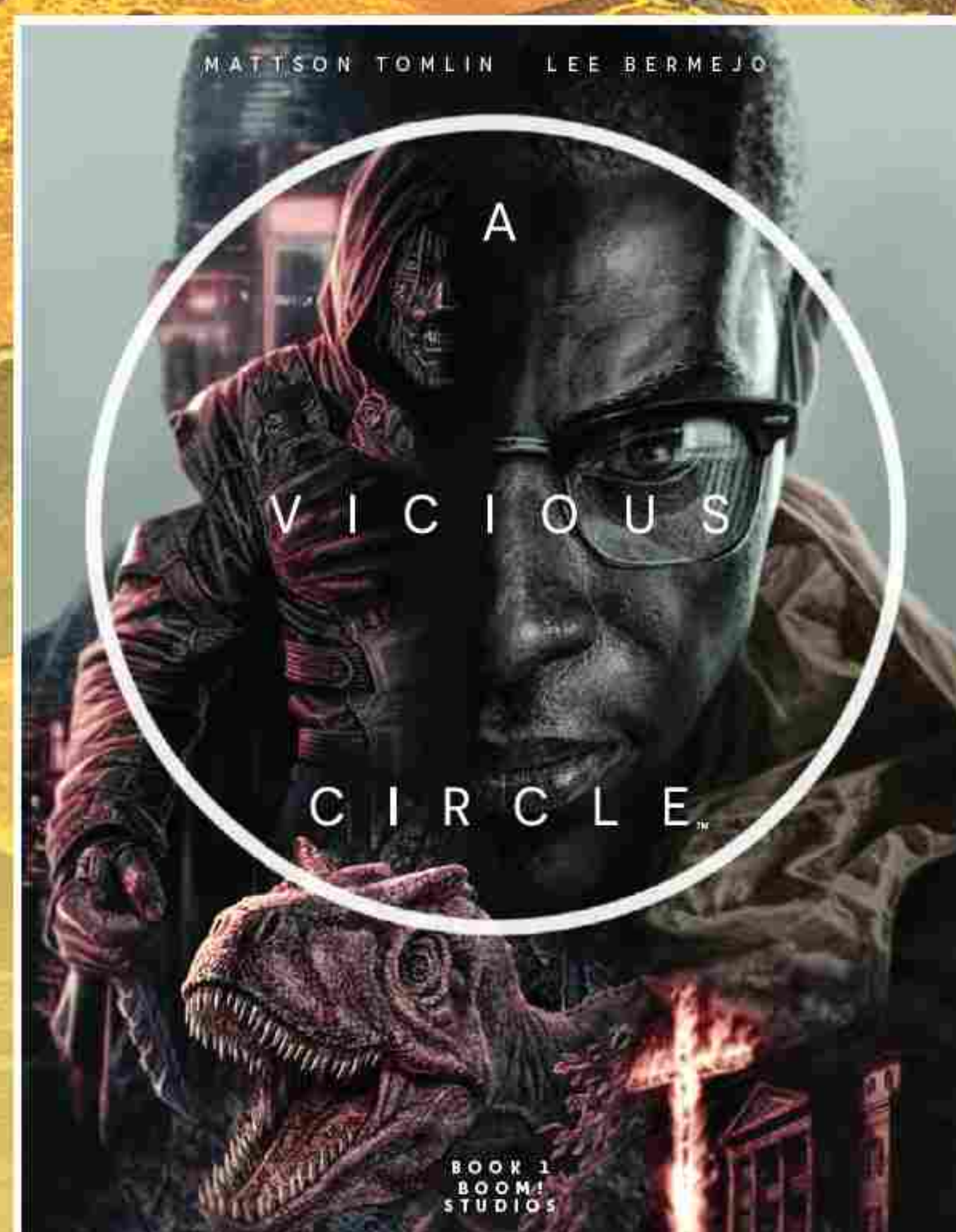
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On Sale Now • Cover by Nick Robles



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MoselyTM

ROB **GUILLORY** ▲ SAM **LOTFI**
JEAN-FRANCOIS **BEAULIEU**

ISSUE FOUR

SON OF ULTRON

"THIS FAN...
THIS MONSTER!"

